

HISTORY OF THE WORSHIP OF ŚRĪ
IN NORTH INDIA TO CIR. 550 A.D.

THESIS PRESENTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
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WITHIN THE FACULTY OF ARTS, 1971.

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A B S T R A C T

This work aims at a full-length study of the history of Śrī in N.India to the end of the Gupta rule. It consists of an introduction, five main chapters, a concluding chapter and an appendix.

Chapter I

discusses the abstractions, Śrī and Lakṣmī as they are found in the Vedic literature and traces the gradual development into the form of a goddess embodying these abstract concepts.

Chapter II

is devoted to the study of the importance of the Śrīsūkta in the evolution of the proper Śrī-Lakṣmī concept, both in the religious and the iconographic sphere.

Chapter III

analyses some of the salient features of selected early divinities to determine the extent to which they anticipated Śrī-Lakṣmī.

Chapter IV

considers the growing attachment of Śrī-Lakṣmī to Viṣṇu and also discusses her association with various gods.

Chapter V

makes a critical study of the extant images of Śrī both in her individual aspect and in association with Viṣṇu. It also examines her iconographic resemblances to various other goddesses and the resultant syncretistic images.

Chapter VI (Conclusion)

presents a brief resumé of the foregoing chapters and attempts an evaluation of Śrī's standing in the Hindu world.

I am indebted to a number of individuals and bodies. To all of these I express my sincerest gratitude. However, I feel that I must single out for special mention Dr. J.G. de Casparis for his constant encouragement and advice and Dr. Wendy O'Flaherty for her invaluable comments and criticisms. Thanks are also due to Mrs. P. Brown and the staff of the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies for their most prompt and courteous service and to Dr. N.Dutt for his help with the plates.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

This work is intended to be a systematic study of the cult of Śrī, also known as Lakṣmī, the much worshipped Hindu goddess of fortune, and endeavours to draw a full picture by analysing all her various aspects; the main sources are ancient literary and archaeological data.

As far as ancient literature is concerned, the materials are not scarcer than for the history of other popular goddesses. Although a deity of considerable importance in Hinduism, Śrī is denied a place in the early Vedas, which are, however, of immense help in determining the range of ideas that could underlie the term śrī, while the later Vedic literature is of great assistance by suggesting the way in which the goddess was conceived. It also includes the Śrīsūkta, an eulogy to Śrī, the first one to emphasise the later importance of the Śrī-Lakṣmī concept.

This concept is further developed in the Epics and the Purāṇas which contain numerous stories that were woven around Śrī and Viṣṇu, the consort she became associated with in the early Christian era. They also reveal various ideas and beliefs associated with the concept of Śrī, and thus help us form a proper image of the goddess. Certain other contemporaneous

literary works, especially those associated with religious matters are of no lesser help as they provide us with material for a proper understanding of Śrī-Lakṣmī. The Pañcarātra Samhitās, as they deal with the higher philosophic conception of Śrī, have ne bearing upon the popular image of the goddess, although later Vaiṣṇava Sects greatly benefitted from this class of literature.

The Purāṇas, although lacking in historical perspective, are nevertheless of immense help as they supply us with elaborate iconographic description of Śrī. To these may be added certain other texts on the canons of iconography. But very few of the Purāṇas and the iconographic texts can be ascribed to the period under survey; However, I have shown no reluctance to make good use of them as they retain the tradition. I have also referred to some works belonging to the South as long as they had some bearing upon my subject. Numerous representations of Śrī, conforming to these canons, came into existence, both alone and in association with other gods while others reveal some of the foreign elements that were incorporated in her concept. A few sculptures betray some syncretism of Śrī with other goddesses. Thus they render great assistance and in some cases I have referred to icons of a later period whenever I felt it necessary.

Apart from these sculptural representations, seals, coins and inscriptions also form an additional source of information. Seals used by the traders, coins issued by the kings and inscriptions both of individual donors and of royal patrons characteristically show her image or have her eulogies in her capacity as the goddess of wealth. In fact, she represents such a strong human desire that it causes no surprise to see that she is the first female deity to be definitely recognised in archaeology as early as the third century B.C. Since then, it is the story of Śrī's gradual ascendancy to power.

I shall not enlarge here upon the intricate question- the importance of which is however not denied- of how far non-aryan components can be clearly recognised in Śrī, but would just venture upon the idea as to how her basic concept was inherent in the primitive cult of the Earth Mother and how her iconographic features bear a distinct trait of the fertility cult of the early period.

So far, a number of papers have been devoted to the study of Śrī-Lakṣmī, but attention has mostly been focused on one or another of the various features of the goddess, but none dealt with all the problems associated with her. Emphasis has often been laid on her being the personification of beauty, sometimes on her aspect as a Sakti of Viṣṇu, sometimes on the legend of

her birth from the ocean. Among them may be counted some excellent investigations by some eminent scholars, such as the article on Śrī-Lakṣmī by A.K.Coomaraswamy;¹ although it mainly deals with her iconographic aspect, it forms a kind of source material for a study of the Śrī-Lakṣmī cult. The Development of Hindu Iconography² furnished useful information, serving the function of a standard reference. Apart from Govinda Chandra's Prācīna Bhārat meṁ Lakṣmī Pratimā, which provides a rich collection of materials, no book has fully studied the Śrī aspect. In some books she is discussed in connexion with Viṣṇu and one such commendable work is J.Gonda's Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism. Lastly, I must not omit Shashi Bhushan Das Gupta's Śrī Rādhār Krama-Vikāś, Darsane O Sāhitye, a penetrative work on the history of Rādhā in Bengali. Rādhā, the beloved of Kṛṣṇa, whose name is doubtless related to the Vedic rādhas (i.e., success, prosperity, wealth, bounty, favour, liberality), while rādhā itself is not entirely unusual instead of samṛddhi, was deified at a later period and was occasionally considered, not unreasonably, as a manifestation of Śrī-Lakṣmī. So Śrī-Lakṣmī holds an important place in it.

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1. Coomaraswamy, A.K., 'Early Indian Iconography : Śrī-Lakṣmī', EA, vol.I, no.3, Jan. 1929.
 2. Banerjea, J,N, The Development of Hindu Iconography, Calcutta 1956.

But in spite of the undeniable importance of Śrī, none of the learned authorities cited above has sufficiently taken into account all the different aspects of Śrī-Lakṣmī, and this, I hope, is the raison d'etre of this work.

ABBREVIATIONSAbh. Nāṭ.AEV.AGBG.Ag.P.Ahir. Samh.AIA.Ait.Āp. Śr. Sūt.Ār.Arch. Surv.ASI.ASIR.ASIAR.Asp. Rel. Thoughts.Āśvl. Gr. Sūt.AV.Baudh. Gr. Sūt.Baudh. Gr. Śsūt.BEFEO.Bhav. P.Bhg. Gītā.Bhg. P.Abhiṣeka Nāṭaka.Aspects of early Viṣṇuism.L'art Graeco-Buddhique du Gandhara.Agni Purāṇa.Ahīrbudhnya Saṃhitā.The art of Indian Asia.Aitareya.Āpastambīya Śrauta Sūtra.Āraṇyaka.Archaeological Survey.Archaeological Survey of India.Archaeological Survey of India, ReportArchaeological Survey of India,Annual Reports.Aspects of Indian Religious Thought.Āśvalāyana Grhya Sūtra.Atharva Veda.Baudhāyana Grhya Sūtra.Baudhāyana Grhya Śeṣa Sūtra.Bulletin de l'ecole Francaise del'extreme orient. Hanoi.Bhaviṣya Purāṇa.Bhagavad Gītā.Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

Bibliog.

BMC.

Br.

Br. Ār. Up.

Brahm. K.

Brahm. P.

BSSS.

Budh. art in India.

BVP.

Camb. Anc. History.

CBIMM.

CCAI.

CGC.

Cl.Age.

CII.

Civil.

CMG.

Devī Bhg. P.

Devī P.

Bibliographic, Bibliography.

Catalogue of the coins in the British Museum.

Brāhmaṇa.

Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad.

Brahma Khaṇḍa.

Brahmaṇḍa Purāṇa.

Bhārater Śakti-sādhana o Śākta sāhitya.

Buddhist art in India.

Brahma Vaivartta Purāṇa.

Cambridge Ancient History.

A catalogue of the Brahmanical images in the Mathura Museum.

Catalogue of the coins of ancient India.

Catalogue of the coins of the Gupta Dynasty.

Classical Age.

Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum.

Civilisation.

Cult of the Mother Goddess.

Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

Devī Purāṇa.

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <u>Devīm.</u> | <u>Devī Māhātmya.</u> Ed. with notes by V.S.Agrawala. |
| <u>DHI.</u> | <u>The development of Hindu iconography.</u> |
| <u>Dict.</u> | <u>Dictionary.</u> |
| <u>EA.</u> | <u>Eastern Art.</u> Philadelphia. |
| <u>Ed.</u> | Edited., edition, editor. |
| <u>EHI.</u> | <u>Elements of Hindu iconography.</u> |
| <u>EISMS.</u> | <u>Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture.</u> |
| <u>Ep. Ind.</u> | <u>Epigraphia Indica.</u> |
| <u>Ep. Myth.</u> | <u>Epic Mythology.</u> |
| <u>ERE.</u> | <u>The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics,</u> Ed. by James Hastings. |
| <u>GB.</u> | <u>The Golden Bough.</u> |
| <u>GOS.</u> | Gaekwad Oriental Series. |
| <u>Gobh. Gr. Sūt.</u> | <u>Gobhilya Grhya Sūtra.</u> |
| <u>Gr. Sūt.</u> | <u>Grhya Sūtra.</u> |
| <u>Hariv.</u> | <u>Harivamśa.</u> |
| <u>Hist. of the Dh. Śāstras.</u> | <u>History of the Dharma Śāstras.</u> |
| <u>Hist. of Sans. lit.</u> | <u>History of Sanskrit Literature.</u> |
| <u>HIIA.</u> | <u>History of Indian and Indonesian Art.</u> |

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| <u>IA.</u> | <u>Indian Antiquary.</u> Bombay. |
| <u>IHQ.</u> | <u>Indian Historical Quarterly.</u> Calcutta. |
| <u>IMC.</u> | <u>Catalogue of the coins in the Indian Museum,</u> Calcutta. |
| <u>Ind. Sculp.</u> | <u>Indian Sculpture.</u> |
| <u>Indus Civil.</u> | <u>Indus Civilisation.</u> |
| <u>Introd.</u> | <u>Introduction.</u> |
| <u>Jaim.</u> | <u>Jaiminiya.</u> |
| <u>JAOS.</u> | <u>Journal of the ancient Oriental Society.</u> New Haven. |
| <u>JASB.</u> | <u>Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.</u> Calcutta. |
| <u>JBBRAS.</u> | <u>Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.</u> Bombay. |
| <u>JISOA.</u> | <u>Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art.</u> Calcutta. |
| <u>JRAS.</u> | <u>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.</u> London. |
| <u>JUPHS.</u> | <u>Journal of the U.P.Historical Society.</u> |
| <u>Kās. Samh.</u> | <u>Kāśyapa Samhitā.</u> |
| <u>Kāth. Samh.</u> | <u>Kāthaka Samhitā.</u> |
| <u>Kumār S.</u> | <u>Kumāra Sambhava.</u> |
| <u>Kumbh. Rec.</u> | <u>Kumbhakonam Recension.</u> |

Madh. Kh.

Mahānār. Up.

Maitr.

Mān. Gr. Sūt.

Mantrap.

Manu.

Mārka. P.

MASI.

Mat. P.

Mbh.

MIC.

MSIAC.

Or. & Ling. Stud.

OST.

Pār. Gr. Sūt.

pl.

PMC.

Port. Verh.

Prak. Kh.

P.

Madhya Khanda.

Mahānārāyaṇīya Upaniṣad.

Maitrayāṇīya.

Mānava Grhya Sūtra.

Mantrapāṭha.

Manu Smṛti.

Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa.

Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey
of India.

Matsya Purāṇa.

Mahābhārata.

Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilisation

Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and
Civilisation.

Oriental and Linguistic Studies.

Original Sanskrit Texts.

Pāraskara Grhya Sūtra.

plate.

Catalogue of the coins in the Punjab
Museum.

Drie oude Portugeesche Vertandingen
over het Hindoeïsme.

Prakṛti Khanda.

Purāṇa.

Ragh.Raghuvamśa.Rām.Rāmāyaṇa.Rel. & Phil. of the Vedas.The Religion and the Philosophy of
the Vedas and the Upanisads.RTL.Religious Thought and Life in India.RV.Rgveda.Sām. Ār.Sāmkhāyana.Samh.Samhitā.SBDG.Shashi Bhushan Das Gupta.SBE.Sacred Books of the East.S. Br.Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.SDFML.The Standard Dictionary of Folk-lore,
Mythology and Legend.SED.A Sanskrit English Dictionary.Sk.P.Skanda Purāṇa.Śrīs.Śrīsūkta.SV.Sāmaveda.Taitt.Taittirīya.Thag. Ā.Theragāthā.Tr.Translated, translation.Trilogie...Trilogie Altindischer Mächte und Feste
der Vegetation.Up.Upanisad.Up.Br.Upa Brāhmaṇa.

Vā. P.

Vāj. Samh.

Vām. P.

Var. P.

Ved. Myth.

Vis. P.

Viśdh. P.

vv.

WSG.

Yt.

YV.

ZDMG.

Vāyu Purāna.

Vājasaneyī Samhitā.

Vāmāna Purāna.

Varāha Purāna.

Vedic Mythology.

Viṣṇu Purāna.

Viṣṇudharmottara Purāna.

Verses.

The Worship of the Sky-God.

Yasht.

Yajurveda.

Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgen-
landischen Gesellschaft. Leipzig.

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C H A P T E R I.

ŚRĪ-LAKṢMĪ IN THE VEDIC LITERATURE

SRI

The word śrī (which with its other variations is just as much Avestic as Vedic), in its literary as well in its religious connotations, is of great significance. The very word which is used to designate beauty and glory, earthly abundance and royal majesty, brilliance and lustre, also indicates a goddess who combines in herself all these qualities. It has also been used as an expression qualifying names and epithets,¹ while as the root of a verb śrināti, it is mentioned in connection with the mixing of milk with soma,² whereby the latter is strengthened.

In the R̥gveda, the word occurs as śrī,³ dhṛtaśrī,⁴ darśata śrī,⁵ śrive,⁶ śriyo,⁷ śriyam,⁸ suśriyam,⁹

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1. It may be repeated several times to express excessive veneration. The Nānāghaṭ Cave Ins. of Sātakarni I and Hāthīgumpha inscription of Khāravela, belonging to the 1st century B.C. seem to be the earliest epigraphic evidence recording the practice of prefixing Śrī to personal names.
 2. RV., IV, 41, 8.
 3. Ibid., IX, 109, 15.
 4. Ibid., X, 65, 2.
 5. Ibid., X, 91, 2.
 6. Ibid., II, 23, 18; IV, 5, 15; LO, 5; V, 60, 4; IX, 104, 1; X, 45, 8; 91, 2; 95, 6; 105, 10.
 7. Ibid., I, 166, 10; III, 1, 5; VII, 15, 5; X, 91, 5.

śreyāṃ,¹ śrāyā,² śreyā,³ śriyā,⁴ śrīnā,⁵ śriyaḥ,⁶
abhiśriyaḥ,⁷ śriyase,⁸ aśrīra,⁹ śriyaradhi,¹⁰ śrīnītaṃ,¹¹
śrīnānā,¹² śrīnānaḥ,¹³ etc. and embraces concepts which,
 though by no means quite similar, all relate to the same
 general idea, viz., signifying something that is bene-
 ficial in one or other respect, something that is
 desirable to mankind in general. A few examples may
 suffice to illustrate the way in which these various

Footnotes 8 and 9 from previous page.

8. RV., I,179,1; VIII,20,7.

9. Ibid., III,3,5; IX,43,4.

1. Ibid., V,60,4.

2. Ibid., V,53,4.

3. Ibid., VI,41,4.

4. Ibid., I,188,6; II,8,3; V,3,4.

5. Ibid., X,45,5.

6. Ibid., II,1,12; IX,16,6.

7. Ibid., X,66,8.

8. Ibid., V,59,3.

9. Ibid., VIII,2,20.

10. Ibid., V,61,12.

11. Ibid., VI,46,4.

12. Ibid., IX,65,26.

13. Ibid., IX,109,17.

conceptions are reflected in the word Śrī. One passage implies the sense of glory, (bhūrīṇi bhadrā naryeṣu bāhaṣu vakṣaṣu rukmā rabhasāso añjayah/ aṃsesvetāḥ pavīṣu kṣurā adhi vayo na pakṣān vyanu śriyo dhire¹ i.e. 'in your manly arms there are many good things, gold chains are on your chests, and glistering ornaments. Deer skins are on your shoulders, on your bellies knives; they spread their glory out as birds spread out their wings').² The same sense is inherent in the passage śriye jātaḥ śriya ā niriyāya śriyam vayo jaritṛbhyo dadhāti / śriyam vasānā amṛtatvamāyan bhavanti satyā samithā mitadrau, meaning 'For glory born he hath come forth to glory: he giveth life and glory to the singers. They, clothed in glory, have become immortal. He, measured in his course, makes frays successful'.⁴

1. RV., I,166,10.

2. Cf. Griffith, R.T.H., The hymns of the Rgveda, I, p. 298.

3. RV., IX,94,4; cf: I,44,3; 116,17; 184,3; 188,6-8; III,60,4; VI,29,3; 77,2; 95,3.

4. Griffith, The hymns..., IV, p.68.

The following passages use śrī in the sense of beauty, of something which is pleasing to the eye, śriye kaṃ vo ādho tanūṣu vāsi¹ ('for beauty you have swords upon your bodies') or śriye sudrśī rūpasya yāh.² Similarly, it also occurs to signify majesty in the lines, asya śriye samidhānasya vṛṣṇo.³ In some other passages, it has the conception of light and brilliance, śriyase kaṃ bhānubhiḥ saṃ mimikṣire⁴ while the sense of purifying or adorning oneself appears in tava śriye maruto marjayanta.⁵ Indra taking the vajra in his hands too is śriye;⁶ the idea that is inherent is to regard the

1. RV., I,88,3; X,85,30; 110,16.

2. Ibid., V,44,2; cf: II,1,12; IV,10,5; VII,15,5; X,45,8. The connection of śrī with the derivatives of drś intensifies the sense of physical beauty (VIII,20,12; X,91,2) and in the Avestā (Ābān Yast,7; 64; Tir Yast, 18, etc.) śrīra is used to imply the same idea. But H. Oldenberg overemphasises the concept of visible beauty (Oldenberg, H., Vedic words for 'beautiful' and 'beauty' and the Vedic sense of the beautiful, Rūpam., XXXII, Oct., 1927, pp. 98-99) while it should be remembered that it is rather difficult to distinguish between well-being or prosperity and the outer appearance of the person who enjoys them. Gonda, J., AEV., p. 181.

3. RV., IV,5,15.

4. CF: Ibid., I,87,6; 113,1; VII,77,5 (śreṣṭha); X,91,5.

5. Ibid., V,3,3; cf: IV,22,2; VIII,7,25; X,77,2.

6. Ibid., I,81,4.

god as being adorned with everything that belongs to his pomp.

Śrī may also have denoted jñāna i.e. wisdom as is suggested by a passage where Agni is described as śrīṇām udāro dharupo rayīnām.¹ It can be explained as udāra with jñāna and thus conveys the sense of brahmaśrī. It finds support in a prayer where śrī is invoked to adorn the head, śric me śrīryaśo mukhaṃ tviṣiḥ keśāśca smaśrūṇi / rājā me prāno amṛtaṃ samrāt cakṣruvirāt śrotram //. ² The Ṛgvedic passage mentioned above also suggests that it did not necessarily convey the sense of riches since rayi (riches) is mentioned with it.³ But it was definitely used in a kindred sense as is evident from śocir vasānaḥ paryāyurapām śriyo mimīte brhatīranūnāḥ,⁴ which refers to the prosperity that Agni abundantly commands. Śriyā tvagnim

1. RV., X,45,5.

2. Vāj.Saṃh., XX,5.

3. This recalls a Ṛgvedic passage which runs as 'This gentle lord gives wisdom to the simple; the wiser god leads on the ariser to riches', (VII,86,7) and thus gives precedence to the concept of wisdom.

4. RV., III,1,5. 'Arraying himself in radiance and in the vitality of the waters, he displays his vast and entire prosperity.' Cf: Gonda, J., AEV., p.180.

atithim janānām,¹ śriyaḥ prkṣaśca,² arṣannabhi śriyaḥ³
seem to admit a similar interpretation.

But the true significance of the word emerges from a passage where the whole concept of śrī is beautifully expressed as amsayor adhi saha ojom bāhvor vo balam hitam armpā śīrṣasv āyudha ratheṣu vo viśvā vaḥ śrīradhi tanūṣu pipiṣe,⁴ "Victorious power (sahas), vital energy (ojas), strength has been put in your arms, courage in your heads, weapons on your cars, the totality of śrī- or the display of every aspect of śrī (viśvā śriyaḥ) has been laid on your bodies",⁵ the underlying implication being the power of śrī to confer 'śreṣṭhatva'.

In the Atharva Veda, śrī is explicitly used in the sense of aiśvarya.⁶ Bhūti (well-being, thriving prosperity, might (sovereignty), power, fortune, wealth), often explained by sampad, sampatti, vibhūti, vibhava, is also

1. RV., X,1,5.

2. Ib., I,139,3.

3. Ib., IX,16,6; 62,19.

4. Ib., V,57,6.

5. Gonda, J., AEV., pp. 178-79.

6. AV., IX,5,31.

used as a synonym for śrī,¹ and applied to objects that represent well being. In the later Vedic period, apart from these major meanings, śrī is often combined with rāstra, kṣatra,² anna, etc., and still retains its association with yaśas; there is a pathetic comment that even the mightiest kings must die, "leaving behind them their great śrī".³

Thus, it is apparent that in the first instance, in ancient Vedic literature, śrī is an abstraction embracing the concept of welfare and prosperity and in a sense, the entire Vedic Samhitā is a 'long drawn cry'⁴ for śrī, that is prosperity, in every sphere of life, beginning with the word ratnadhātama (agnimile purohitam vajñasya devamrtvijam / hotāram ratnadhātamam) in the very first stanza of the Rgveda.⁵ The Rgveda, which is priestly and hieratic in character, practical and

1. AV., XII,1,63.

2. Kṣatraśrī already occurs in the Rgveda, VI,26,8.

3. Atha ... prabhrtayo rājāno bhisato bandhuvargasya mahatīm śriyam tyaktvā smālokaḍamun lokam prayatā iti, Maitr. Up., I,4.

4. Bloomfield, M., Atharva Veda, p.80.

5. RV., I,1,1.

utilitarian in purpose, is ritualistic in practice. Happiness, health, wealth, long life, children are sought for and rich presents are bestowed on the priests for acting as intermediaries in securing such objects, 'I give thee that thou may'st give me', is the constantly recurring thought. In other words, through the whole range of the Vedic hymns, divinities are called upon individually to furnish prosperity.

The purpose of the Atharvan is also to make special provision for individual desires, very much in the manner of Kāmyeṣṭi of the Srauta literature,¹ but to an extent and with a degree of thoroughness unknown elsewhere. "House and home, grain and rain, field and river, trading and gambling, journeying and returning, serpents and vermin, furnish the special themes for prayers and charms. And over it all is the still more persistent outcry after wealth and progeny, exemption and protection from calamity and danger. Such is the impression gained from this class, which, barring the twentieth book, forms rather more than one-fifth of the hymns of the Saṃhitā."²

1. Cf: 'Kāmya iṣṭayah' in Albrecht Weber's 'Die Taittirīya Saṃhitā', Indische Studien, XI, 1871, p.343; Oldenberg, H., 'The Grhya Sūtras', SBE., XXX, 1892, p.306 ff.

2. Bloomfield, M., Atharva Veda, p. 80.

As in the Rgveda, so in the Atharva Veda, as well as in the other Vedas, deities are called upon individually to furnish prosperity. Indra,¹ Agni,² Agni Vaiśvānara,³ Savitr,⁴ Uṣas,⁵ Sarasvatī,⁶ the divine eagle (Tārṁśya Ariṣṭanemi),⁷ the devapatnyah⁸ and even the personified phases of the moon,⁹ the female genii of these phases,¹⁰ the personified lunar day,¹¹ all are

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1. RV., VII,27,3; AV., XIX,5.
 2. RV., VII,41; X,141; AV., III,16; III,20; VII,82; XIX,8; Taitt.Br., I,2,1,21 ff.
 3. AV., VI,35 & 36; SV., II,1058-60.
 4. AV., VI,1; VII,14; 15; SV., I,464 ff; Maitrayāṇīya Samhitā, II,10,6.
 5. RV., X,172,4; VI,17,15; AV., XIX,12.
 6. AV., VII,68; Taitt.Samh., III,1,11,3.
 7. RV., I,164,52; X,178,1; AV., VII,85.
 8. RV., V,46,7-8; AV., VII,49.
 9. AV., VII,79-81.
 10. RV., II,32,7; V,42,12; X,184; AV., VII,20; 46; 47; 48.
 11. AV., III,10.

implored for wealth and riches and especially offspring.

All these desires seem to find a living expression in the later Vedic period, in the concrete concept of a goddess who emerged from the very person of Prajāpati by his asceticism, in the form of a beautiful heavenly maiden. (This reminds one of the story of the birth of Pallas Athene out of the aching head of Zeus.) Because of her beauty and resplendence, she was envied by all the deities, who wished to kill her. But Prajāpati begged them not to do this as she was a female, and asked them to take away all her qualities instead. So Agni, Soma, Varṇa^u, Mitra, Indra, Br̥haspati, Savitr̥, Puṣan, Sarasvatī and Tvaṣṭr took from her food, Kingdom, universal sovereignty, noble rank, power, holy lustre, dominion, wealth, prosperity and beautiful forms respectively. Then on Prajāpati's advice, the goddess offered sacrificial dishes to the ten divinities and had everything restored to her.¹ Thus the essence of

1. SBr., XI,4,3,1 ff. Some scholars interpret this story as an instance of the aryanisation of the goddess who, according to them, was a non-Aryan divinity, but was accepted within Vedic hierarchy by performing some sacrifices to some Aryan deities. Cf: Chandra, Govinda, Prācīna Bhārat meṁ Lakṣmī Pratimā, p. 25.

the story is that the goddess is the embodiment of all the major things that man desires.¹ This naturally suggested the term Śrī as the designation of the goddess.

LAKṢMĪ

Another remarkable facet of this later Vedic period is the way in which the conceptions and expressions of Śrī and Lakṣmī converged. Lakṣmī, another and most popular of the names of Śrī, is found once in the Ṛgveda to denote a mark or sign, obviously an auspicious one, Saktumiva titadanā punanto yatra dhīrā manasā vācamakrata / atra sakhāyaḥ sakhyāni jānate bhadraishāṃ lakṣmīrnihitādhi vāci,² "Where, like men cleansing cornflour in a cribble, the wise in spirit have created language, friends see and recognise the marks of friendship: their speech retains the blessed sign imprinted".³

1. The SBr., (X,1,4,14) also admits that one who has got Śrī has achieved everything. Even the deity who possesses śrī becomes illustrious and enlightened. (II,1,4,9).

2. RV., X,71,2; Cf: Nirukta, IV,10.

3. Griffiths, R.T.H., The hymns of the Ṛgveda, IV, p.244.

The etymological connection between lakṣmī and lakṣman is realised in a Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa passage yasya dakṣinato lakṣma bhavati tam puṇyalakṣmīka ityācakṣate¹ (he who has a mark (lakṣma) on his right side is said to have good luck (puṇya-lakṣmīka)). According to Oldenberg "Lakṣman is the outward and visible sign of a happy or unhappy disposition; lakṣmī is this disposition itself, which is proclaimed or can be proclaimed by a lakṣman."² With or without pāpī, lakṣmī may also signify a bad sign of impending misfortune, as is found in the Atharva Veda,³ "The human being is born with a hundred and one lakṣmīs. They can fly on to him with wings, they can attach themselves to him, as lichen clings to a tree. Magic (described in the Kauṣītaki Stotra, XVIII, 16 ff) causes evil lakṣmī to vanish; the god Savitā removes them; they can be attached to an enemy by means of nails. But people

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1. SBr., VIII,4,4,11; Cf: 5,4,3. The commentator on the Śrīsūkta defines the name Lakṣmī as 'Lakṣmīm-lakṣmanavatiṃ', Śrīsūktam, Vidyāraṇyabhāṣyam, p. 3.
 2. Oldenberg, H., op.cit., Rūpam, XXXII, Oct. 1927, p. 105. J. Gonda modifies this statement in a slightly different manner. AEV., p.215.
 3. AV., VII,115; XII,5,6.

wish good lakṣmīs to remain."¹ But with puṇyā, it is usually a good sign which eventually expands into the concepts of good fortune, prosperity, success, happiness and plenty.² (This transition from mark and sign to luck and fortune is already developing in the Taittirīya Saṁhitā.³) In the course of time, this

1. Oldenberg, H., op.cit., Rūpam., XXXII, Oct. 1927, p.105. This idea finds an echo in the Paippalāda Saṁhitā (XX,20) which also mentions one hundred lakṣmīs. Some of these lakṣmīs, known as Pāpiṣṭhā, Bhrunaghñī, Patighñī, Devaraghñī, Rudriyā, Ghorā, Putraghñī, Bhīmā, Patayalu, etc. are considered inauspicious and therefore to be warded off. The others are Bhadrā, Puṇyā and Kalyāṇī and naturally they are the revered ones. In the Mantra Brāhmaṇa (1,4,5), a brahmin invokes the assistance of other divinities to ward off from a woman the Pāpī lakṣmī, which is specified as Patighñī, Aputrata, etc. It is worthy of note that in the Rgveda the word lakṣmī occurs in the sense of an auspicious sign, but later the idea has become personified in females characterised by these lucky and unlucky signs.
2. Cf: in this regard, another interpretation of the name 'Lakṣmī', - jñānaiśvarya sukhārogya dhanadhānya jayādikam / lakṣma yasyassamuddiṣṭam sa lakṣmiti nigadyate // Srisuktam, p.5.
3. Taitt. Saṁh., II,1,5,2; Cf: Ait.Br., II,40,8, etc.

duality in the conception of lakṣmī, which finds lasting expression in the adjectives bhadra, śiva and punya and conversely in pāpa, recedes in the background leaving the auspicious meaning of the word in entire possession of the field or very nearly so. "This auspicious meaning of Lakṣmī comes very near to the conception of Śrī¹ both expressing well-being and splendour of existence. Thus it was easy for Śrī, signifying happiness, and Lakṣmī, the disposition to receive it, to merge."²

ŚRĪ-LAKṢMĪ

It cannot be said definitely as to when Śrī and Lakṣmī, different at the beginning, came to be identified with each other. In the Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā, they are still two different entities as the two wives of the Puruṣa (the Supreme), being interpreted as Beauty

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1. The literature of a later period also illustrates how the various concepts of Śrī were fused with that of Lakṣmī. Brahmaśrī and lakṣmī are no longer different; at the sight of the teja of Viśvamitra, Rāma utters: tapastejomayīm lakṣmīmadya puṣṇāti me guruḥ! (Anargha Rāghava, Sūtradhāra, II, 38). The Śrī or Kānti that Rāma was besmeared with is called 'punya lakṣmī kayoḥ' (Ib., III, 34).
 2. Moti Chandra, 'Our Lady of Beauty and Abundance, 'Padma Śrī', JUPHS., Vol. XXI, parts 1-2, 1948, pp. 21-22.

and Fortune. Śrīśca te lakṣmīśca patnyāvahorātre
pārśve nakṣatrāṇi rūpamaśvinau vyāttam / iṣam niṣānamum
ma iṣāna sarvalokaṃ ma iṣāna //. ¹ "Beauty and Fortune
 are thy two wives; each side of thee are day and night.
 The constellations are thy form, the Asvins are thy open
 jaws. Wishing, with yonder world for me, wish that the
 universe be mine."

But they seem to form an inseparable pair, like
 day and night, like the Aśvins, and this combination
 then leads to their identification.²

A comparatively old testimony to the identification
 of Śrī and Lakṣmī has been furnished by the Śrīsūkta,
 a late supplement (khila) to the Rgveda. As Devī-
Sūkta³ is the source of the concept of Devī, so Śrī-Sūkta

1. Vāj.Samh., XXXI, 22. Here Śrī and Lakṣmī have been
 interpreted as denoting Brahmaśrī and Rajalakṣmī.
 In the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka (III,13,2) the two wives of
 Puruṣa are described as Hri and Lakṣmī (hriśca te
lakṣmīśca patnyau..).
2. But this identification was not always absolute. Even
 at a later period, Śrī and Lakṣmī have occasionally
 been referred to as two different personalities.
 In the Rāmāyana (III,46,17) according to Rāma's com-
 mentary, Śrī is aiśvaryapradhāna and Lakṣmī is
saubhāgyapradhāna. Śāyana ventures to interpret
 these two names as yayā āśrayaṇīyo bhavati sā śrīḥ /
adityaḥ yayā tu lakṣyate sā lakṣmīḥ // śrīḥ sobhanarūpā /
lakṣmīḥ diptīlakṣaṇacid rūpīṇi // Puruṣa Sūkta, Ed. by
 Daṇḍirajaśāstri, p. 67. But this could not affect
 their essential identity.
3. RV., X,125.

is said to be the root from which Śrī originated.¹

The date of the Sūkta is controversial. It cannot be as old as the Rgveda, but as it has been incorporated within the foremost of the Vedas, the date cannot be too late. According to Max Muller, Śrīsūkta is of considerable antiquity² and "probably pre-Buddhist" as has been suggested by Coomaraswamy.³ Oldenberg places the Sūkta earlier than the ancient Buddhist canonical poetry, on the strength of the fact that "it is mentioned in the Bṛhaddevatā and the ancient metre ... still occurs not infrequently in those syllables (e.g. śriyam devīm upahvaye, śriyam vāsaya me kule"⁴ but "Several traits of the form of expression" speak against dating the Sūkta very early.⁵ The iconographic traits also testify to its antiquity. This problem will be dealt with later on.

1. Cf: SBDG., Śrī Rādhār Krama Vikāś, darśane o Sāhitye, pp. 14-22.

2. Maxmuller, M., Rgveda Samhitā with Sāyana's commentary, vol. IV, pp. 5-11.

3. Coomaraswamy, A.K., 'Śrī-Lakṣmī', E.A., vol. 1, No. 3. January, 1929, p.175.

4. Oldenberg, H., op.cit., Rūpam., XXXII, Oct. 1927, pp. 105-06.

5. Ib., p. 105.

Śrī and Lakṣmī are no longer different personalities in the Śrīsūkta but one and the same goddess, invoked by the same adjectives¹ and implored to abide in the houses of their worshippers.² The opposite hostile power is no longer known as 'evil lakṣmī' but as Alakṣmī.³ Lakṣmī is now something inherently good, venerated to bring to her devotees those objects that they found most desirable while settling down in a new land in an adverse environment. So they ask her not for spiritual blessings but for wealth and welfare, in particular cows⁴ and horses, long life with land, victory in expeditions against their enemies and relief in time of drought. Śrī-Lakṣmī appears here as a most benevolent mother goddess.

But the intermediary stages through which Śrī had to pass to reach this form, as is described in the Śrīsūkta, are not easy to define. In this developed form we find the concept of a goddess fused with a Vedic

1. Śrīs., verses 4, 13, 14.

2. Ib., 11,13.

3. Ib., 6,8; cf: Gobh.Gr.Sūt., IV,6,3; Āpast.Śr.Sūt., Mantrap., I,1,5.

4. cf: '... in praying for the blessing of cattle, he prays for Śrī - for cattle means Śrī.' ŚBr., 1,8,1,36.

abstraction. In fact, the desire for welfare and prosperity is always inherent in general mind. In the Rgveda,¹ desire is said to have been the first impulse, and this desire finds an almost universal expression in the Vedic Samhitās, and 'śrī' seems to fulfil this desire in every possible aspect. Thus, in its earliest and most common usage, the word that symbolised what men hankered for, was gradually given a figurative expression in the form of a beautiful goddess Śrī-Lakṣmī, who could herself bestow those boons on those worthy of them.²

This primary abstract concept of Śrī-Lakṣmī is apparent in the later period as well. In the Epics and in the Purāṇas, Śrī is always mentioned with other goddesses known as Hrī, Medhā, Kṣamā, Kānti, Dhṛti, Āśā, Śraddhā, etc., terms that are nothing but mere abstractions. In a Mahābhārata passage,³ in her speech to Indra, Śrī says 'There where I reside, the seven other goddesses with Jayā for their eighth, who love me, who are inseparably associated with me, and who depend

1. RV., X,129,4.

2. Supra, p.10.

3. Mbh., xii,229,82 f. We also see her being invoked with Sampatti (Pār.Gr.Sūt., II,17,9) and Bhūti (Rām., II,46,17) which were nothing but qualities as we have seen above.

upon me, desire to live. They are Hope, Faith, Intelligence, Contentment, Victory, Advancement and Forgiveness.' The Mahābhārata also speaks of Kṛṣṇa's encounter with the ṛṣis who were endowed with brāhmīśrī or holy lustre.¹ According to the Brahmaṇḍa Purāṇa,² whoever performs śrāddha on a daśamī day, gains brāhmīśrī. The Parama Samhitā personifies this particular concept when it states that one who wishes to attain the wealth of learning must worship Brahmaśrī (i.e. Brāhmīśrī) with white lotus flowers and to obtain Kṣattriyaśrī (i.e. Rājyaśrī) he must offer red lotus flowers.³ These personified forms have again been given concrete shapes in the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa⁴ which lays down instructions for the making of the images of Brāhmīlakṣmī along with Rājaśrī⁵ beside the principal image of Śrī (Kālidāsa

1. Mbh., v,63,81. cf: also XIV,16,22.

2. Brahmaṇḍa P., III,17,15.

3. Parama Samh., XV,30-31. The King and Śrī are so closely related that even the throne of the King is called Śrī (Jaim.Br., II,25; Ait.Br., VIII,12,8) possibly due to the conviction that the throne enthrones the true concept of the King.

4. Viṣdh.P., III,82;140. Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, 1.147.

5. The Harsacarita says that when Harsa's father died, his mother declared that the goddess of royal glory was disconsolate ever craving the sight of another lord. (Rosenfield, J., The Dynastic Art of the Kushanas, p. 199). In Bhasa's Pratijñyā Yangandharāyana Nāṭaka Śrī in the sense of Rājyaśrī is the Śrī of an enemy,

describes Rājāśrī as standing with a kamalachakra).¹ Other forms of Lakṣmī are also conceived of, they are Svargalakṣmī and Jayalakṣmī, who are also to be enshrined in the same sanctum. Thus each particular Śrī or Lakṣmī in her own special aspect receives a concrete image and this recalls the Alakṣmī concept, which is possibly the most conclusive of all the evidence of the original abstraction of Śrī-Lakṣmī. She, although a contradiction of the true significance of Śrī-Lakṣmī, nevertheless has found a concrete expression² which, as far as I am aware, has no analogous occurrence in the history of any other divinity. Thus

Footnote 5 continued from previous page.

Śatroḥ śriyaṃ hitvā prāpto jayaśca nrpatiśca mahānśca
sabdaḥ (IV,6). Cf: the Pratimā Nāṭaka (III,20;
IV,3). This recalls the concept of Jayaśrī (Ragh.,
XII,93; Br.Samh., LXVIII,92) and also the old practice
when the wife of the Yajamana priest is considered to
be Śrī and the sacrifice is performed to obtain that
Śrī which is destined at the end of the war, i.e.
the Vijayaśrī of a later period which dwells at the
tip of the victor's sword, vijayaśrīr vīraṇam
vyutpanna pracanda vanitveva.

1. Kālidāsa, Ragh., IV,5; Kumāra Sambhava, VII,89.
2. It will be elaborated in the next chapter.

the affirmation of the various ideas associated with Śrī-Lakṣmī as well as the denial, given concrete form, accentuate the abstract concept of Śrī-Lakṣmī which is still retained.¹

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1. Even to this day, to denote an appearance or to refer to a condition, there is the colloquial use of the word chiri (derived from Śrī); everything that is disagreeable, is viśrī; regardless of the gender, it is used to describe both a good boy and a good girl (lakṣmī chēle, lakṣmī meye).

C H A P T E R I I .

ASPECTS OF ŚRĪ REFLECTED IN THE ŚRĪSŪKTA

ŚRĪ SŪKTAM(THE ŚRĪSŪKTA)

hiranyavarnām harinīm suvarṇarajatasrajām
candrām hiraṇmayīm lakṣmīm jātavedo ma ā vaha 1

tāmma ā vaha jātavedo lakṣmīmanapagāminīm
yasyām hiraṇyam vindeyam gām aśvam puruṣān aham 2

aśvapūrvām rathamadhyām hastinādaprabodhinīm
śriyam devīmupahvaye śrīrmādevī juṣatām 3

kām sosmitām hiranyaprākārāmārdrām jvalantīm
trptām tarpayantīm
padme-sthitām padmavarnām tāmihopahvaye śriyam 4

candrām prabhāsām yaśasā jvalantīm śriyam loke
devajuṣtamudārām
tām padminīmīm śaraṇam prapadye lakṣmīrme naśyatām
tvām vrṇomi 5

ādityavarṇe tapaso'dhijāto vanaspatistava vrkṣo
'tha bilvah
tasya phalāni tapasā nudantu yā antarā yāśca
bāhyā alakṣmīḥ 6

upaitu mām devasakhah kīrtiśca maṇinā saha
prādurbhūto'smi rāstre' smin kīrtimṛddhim dadātu me 7

| | |
|--|----|
| <u>kṣutpipāsāmalām jyesthām alaksmīm nāśayāmyaham</u> <u>abhūtimasamrddhim ca sarvām nirnud me grhāt</u> | 8 |
| <u>gaṇ dhadvārām durādharśām nityapustām karisinīm</u> <u>iśvarīm sarvabhūtānām tāmihopahvaye śriyam</u> | 9 |
| <u>manasāḥ kāmamākutim vācaḥ satyamaśīmahi</u> <u>paśunām rūpamannasya mayi śriḥ śrayatām yaśaḥ</u> | 10 |
| <u>kardamena prajā bhūtā mayi sambhava kardama</u> <u>śriyam vāsaya me kule mātaram padmamālinīm</u> | 11 |
| <u>āpaḥ sriḥ antu snigdhāni ciklita vasa me grhe</u> <u>ni ca devīm mātaram śriyam vāsaya me kule</u> | 12 |
| <u>ādrām puṣkarinīm pustim piṅgalām padmamālinīm</u> <u>candrām hiraṇmayīm lakṣmīm jātavedo ma ā vaha</u> | 13 |
| <u>ādrām yahkarinīm yastim suvarṇām hemamālinīm</u> <u>sūryām hiraṇmayīm lakṣmīm jātavedo ma āvaha</u> | 14 |
| <u>tām ma āvaha jātavedo lakṣmīmanapagāminīm</u> <u>yasyām hiraṇyam prabhūtam gāvo dāsyo' svān</u> <u>bindeyam puruṣānaham</u> | 15 |
| <u>yah śuciḥ prayato bhūtvā juhuyādājyamanvaham</u> <u>śriyam pañ cadasārcam ca śrikāmaḥ satatam japet</u> | 16 |

padmānane padmavipadmapatre padmapriye padmadalāyatākṣi
viśvapriye viṣnumano ' nukule tatpādapadmam mayi sam ni dhatsva 17.

padmānane padmaūrū padmākṣi padmasambhave
tanme bhajasi padmākṣi yena saukhyam labhāmyaham 18 .

aśvadāyi godāyi dhanadāyi mahādhane
dhanam me juṣatām devī sarvakāmāmsca dehi me 19 .

putrapautra dhanam dhānyam hastyās^ādigave ratham
prajānām bhavasi mātā āyusmantam karotu me 20 .

dhanamagnir dhanamvāyur^udhanam sūryo dhanam vasuh
dhanamindro brhaspati rvaruṇo dhanamaśvinā 21 .

vainateya somam piba somam pibatu vrtrahā
somam dhanasya somino mahyam dadātu sominaḥ 22 .

na krodho na ca mātsaryam na lobho nāśubha matih
bhavanti kṛtapuṇyānām bhaktyā śrīsūktajāpinām 23 .

sarasijanilaye sarojahaste dhavalatarāṃśūka gandhamālyasobhe
bhagavati hariballabhe manojñe tribhuvanabhūtikari prasīda mahyam 24 .

viṣṇupatnīm kṣamām devīm mādhavīm mādhavapriyām
lakṣmīm priyasakhīm devīm namāmyacyuta ballabhām 25 .

mahālakṣmyai ca vidmahe viṣṇupatnyai ca dhīmahi
tanno lakṣmih pracodayāt 26 .

ānandah kardamah śrīda ściklīta iti visrutāh

rṣayah śriyah putrāsca śrīdevīrdevatā matāh

27.

ṛnarogādi dāridrya pāpaksudapamṛtvavah

bhaya śoka manastāpā nasyantu mama sarvadā

28 .

śrīrvarcasvam āyuṣyam ārogyamāvidhā cchobhomānam mahiyate

dhanam dhānyam paśum bahūputra lābham śatasamvatsaram dīrghamāyuh 29.

iti Śrisūktam

T R A N S L A T I O N

Do thou Jātavedas, on my behalf, invoke Lakṣmī, of golden complexion, (of the form of) a deer, decked with the garlands of silver and gold, (who is like) a moon (and) of the nature of gold.

1

Do thou Jātavedas, on my behalf, invoke that Lakṣmī who departs not;(in) whose (presence) I will Acquire gold, kine and horses and human beings.

2

I invoke that Śrī (to come near) with steeds in her van, cars in the midst, announcing (her presence) in the cry of the elephants. May that Śrī be propitious to me.

3

I invoke that Śrī (to draw) near, (of) pleasant countenance, surrounded (or environed) with gold, moist, radiant, satisfied, satisfier, seated on a lotus, of the hue of a lotus.

4

I seek for refuge to that Śrī, bright as the moon, shining with fame, revered by the gods in the world (above), bountiful, a lotus (in loveliness). Thee do I solicit that my evil fortune may be removed.

5

Resplendent as the sun, by reason of thy austerities,
your tree came into being, to wit the bilva tree. Through
thy favour, may its fruit henceforth, preclude for me evil
fortune, be they internal or external.¹

6

May the friend of the gods (Kubera) and Renown, with
the Gem, be secured to me. I was brought forth in this realm.
Do thou bestow upon me fame and abundance.

7

Defiled with hunger and thirst, Alakṣmī, the elder
(sister of Lakṣmī), would I repel. Do thou remove from
my dwelling all poverty and calamity.

8

I invoke that Śrī (to come) near, marked by (her) odour,
hard to be conquered, everthriving (with harvest), (who)
resides in cowdung (and is) the mistress of all.

9

May I obtain the desire of (my) heart, (the object of my)
vow, and the veracity of my utterance, the cattle and (the
various) forms of edibles. May Śrī (Prosperity) abide in
my (house) and Renown.

10

1. Cf: Gonda, J. AEV, pp.197-98.

A progeny has been born (to thee) in Kardama. Do thou Kardama abide with (me) in (my abode), (and) cause that Mother Śrī, (who is) lotus garlanded, to dwell with my family.

11

May water accomplish (its) humid (duties). Stay in my abode Ciklīta and make that Śrī, the divine mother, stay in my household.

12

Do thou Jātavedas, on my behalf, invoke Lakṣmī, (who is) moist, provided with a lotus (or is a lotus flower herself), thriving, gold coloured, golden, lotus garlanded, (illuminous like) a moon, of the nature of gold.

13

Do thou Jātavedas, on my behalf, invoke Lakṣmī, moist, verge in hand, a mace (to wrong doers), of golden complexion, (who is) wearing a golden necklace, (radiant as) the sun (and) of the nature of gold.

14

Do thou Jātavedas, on my behalf, invoke that Lakṣmī who departs not (and) who (being present), I shall acquire gold in exuberance, kine, servants and human beings.

15

Whoever being pure and well-prepared, daily performs sacrifices with clarified butter, (if) desirous of Śrī, should continually mutter the fifteen verses (dedicated) to Śrī.

16

Lotus faced, resembling the lotus leaf, dear to lotus,
(thou) of eyes as long as a lotus petal, beloved of all, gracious
to the wishes of Viṣṇu, place thy lotus feet in (my) heart. 17

Lotus faced, lotus thighed, lotus eyed and born of a lotus
(flower), pray (for) me in such a way that I may obtain happiness. 18

Giver (art thou) of horses, giver of kine, giver of wealth.
Most plentiful, may riches accrue to me (and) do thou, goddess,
confer upon me all (my) desires. 19

(Grant unto me) sons, grandsons, abundance, corn, elephants
horses, kine and chariots. Make me longlived (for) thou art
the mother of sentient creation. 20

The fire possesses the wealth; the wind, wealth; the sun,
wealth; the Vasus, wealth; Indra, wealth; and Brhaspati and
Varuṇa (and the) Aśvins, wealth. 21

Son of Vinatā, drink the soma juice; may Vṛtrahan
imbibe the soma juice. (May) the ministrant priests,
(procurers) of wealth, (partake of) the soma juice. May the
gods bestow upon me (the reward of sacrifice). 22

(For) the meritorious votaries, (for those) muttering the Śrīsūkta, there is neither resentment, nor malevolence, nor avarice, nor sinister sentiment.

23

Having (her) abode in the lotus, (with) lotus in her hand, beautiful with a super white raiment (and) auspicious fragrance (and) garlands, adorable, beloved of Hari, pleasing to mind, source of well-being of the three worlds, be gracious to me.

24

To the spouse of Viṣṇu, (the one with) the Earth, the resplendent, Mādhavī, the beloved of Mādhava, (who) loves (her) friends, (or the dear friend), (the one) dear to Acyuta, the goddess Lakṣmī, I offer salutation.

25

We recognise the great Lakṣmī, and we meditate on the consort of Viṣṇu. Therefore, may Lakṣmī inspire us.

26

The celebrated Ānanda, Kardama, Śrīda and Ciklīta, progenies of Śrī, (are) the rṣis (of this ode); the mother goddess Śrī is (its) divinity.

27

Debt, sickness, poverty, sin, hunger, sudden death, fear,
sorrow, anguish, for my benefit, may they be dispelled forever. 28

Of auspicious dignity, longevity and ^{exemption from} sickness she renders
(to her worshippers) ; (and) wealth, grain, cattle, numerous
offspring and life prolonged to hundred years (does she provide
to him). With marked difference he manifests on earth (who does
her honour). 29

The Śrīsūkta in ritual

The Śrīsūkta (a brief text appended to the regular collection of the hymns of the fifth book of the Rgveda), is an important contribution to the evolution of the proper Śrī-Lakṣmī concept. It characterises in its first fifteen verses most of the distinctive features that the goddess came to possess in her later developed form. Some of her persistent characteristics seem to be confirmed by this very text and some of the late Epic and Paurāṇic tales and legends appear to have originated from these sūtras as well. According to the Brhaddevatā,¹ the Śrīsūkta is an 'āśīrvāda' (benediction), while the Viṣṇudharmottara purāṇa² takes the Śrīsūkta to be 'puṣṭivardhana', (promoting growth or nourishment).

1. Brhaddevatā., v, 91. Śrīsūktamāśīrvādastu śrīputrāṇāṃ paraniṣat.

2. Viṣṇu. Pur., II, 128, 3; prativedam samācakṣva śrīsūktam puṣṭivardhanam.

According to the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, the hymns to Śrī, that is the Śrīsūkta are four in number, in accordance with the number of the four Vedas.¹ It says that the stanza starting with hiranyavarnām harinīm along with the following fifteen verses² belongs to the Rgveda (thus this presupposes that the sūkta originally consisted of the first fifteen verses). Three other sūktas devoted to Śrī, one beginning with ratheṣvakṣeṣu vāje³ along with the following four verses belong to the Yajurveda; the second beginning with śrāyantīyam tathā sāmā⁴ to the Sāmaveda and the third, the line śriyam dhātarmayi dhehi⁵ to the Atharvaveda.⁶

1. Viṣdh.P., II, 128, 4-6.

2. Śrīs., verses 1-15.

3. Taitt.Br., II, 7, 7, 2.

4. RV., viii, 99, 3.

5. Āp.Sr.Sūt., vi, 60, 2.

vivardhanam

6. Cf: Ag.P., 263, 1-3. śrīsūktam prativedaṅca jñeyam lakṣmī/ hiranyavarnām harinīm rchāḥ pañcadaśaḥ śriyaḥ ratheṣvakṣeṣu vājeti catasro yajuṣi śriyaḥ śrāyantīyam tathā sāmā śrīsūktam samavedake śriyam dhātarmayi dhehi proktam atharvane tathā Apart from these, there exist other Śrīsūktas as well. Cf: Kane, P.V., History of the Dharma Śāstra, III, p. 77, n. 110. In the Uttara Khanda of the Padma-Purāṇa, we come across an abridged form of the Śrīsūkta:

hiranya varṇam harinīm suvarṇarajata srajaṁ candrām hiraṇmayīm lakṣmīm viṣṇoranapagaminīm gandhadvaram duradharsam nityapustam kariṣinīm isvarīm sarvabhūtanāntāmihopahvaye śriyam etc.

255, 28 ff. cf: SBDG., Śrī Rādhār Krama Vikāś, p. 18.

Certain speculations made by Govinda Shastri¹ suggest that the Srīsūkta was once comprehended in some portions, now lost, of the Atharvaveda. He even concludes on the basis of verbal resemblance that the forty-fifth couplet of the Atharvāna Rahasya, as he finds it in the Lakṣmīstava of the Kāśīkhaṇḍa, is paraphrased from Srīsūkta of the Atharvaveda. Kulluka Bhaṭṭa names along with the Srīsūkta, the Sivasāṅkalpa and it is well-known that the thirty-second chapter of the Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā is still known by that designation.²

But without attaching much importance to all these speculations, it can safely be said that the Srīsūkta was composed in the period when the Yajurveda and the Brāhmaṇas were being written and compiled. It is one of the later Khilas that originated in connection with the ritual that gradually arose in that period and the Srīsūkta stands in relation to the worship of Śrī and Lakṣmī, contemplated as a concrete goddess then. It has been numerously quoted in the later Vedic literature,

1. Cf: Hall, Fitz-Edwards: 'The Srīsūkta, or Litany to Fortune', JASB., No.28,1859,p.122 ff.; Maxmüller, M.: Rgveda with Sāyana's Commentary, vol.IV,pp.5-11.

2. Kashikar, C.G.: Rgvedasaṃhitā, pp. 897, 901-902.

(which presupposes its antiquity) and has been handed down through a large number of manuscripts. The number of the verses differ in different manuscripts;¹ out of the generally accepted twenty-nine verses, only the first fifteen have been commented upon (the sixteenth one being the phalaśrūti)² and this has led scholars to assume that the first fifteen verses are original.³ Again the second half of the thirteenth stanza is a repetition of the first verse; it is found again in the fourteenth, and the fifteenth is very much similar to that of the second and thus it shows the gradual completion of the Sūkta. The remaining stanzas which bear explicit marks of a later period, were evidently later insertions.⁴

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1. Sheftelowitz, I., 'Śrī-sūkta', Z D M G., (75), 1921, p.37.
 2. The merit that one acquires by reading or reciting a sūkta. Here it is noteworthy that the phalaśrūti recommends the recitation of the fifteen verses dedicated to Śrī. Cf: the translation of verse no.16.
 - 3.. Sheftelowitz, I., Z D M G., (75), 1921, p.44; Banerjea, J.N., D.H I., p.372; S B D G., Śrī radhār ... p.14.
 4. Moreover, it is only in the second half where the number of the verses differ and where they are arranged in a different order in different manuscripts.

A study of the religious literature of India shows that the sūkta has often been commented upon, read and recited, and repeatedly quoted in books dealing with religious rites. Thus the verses are referred to in several Grhya Sūtras¹ and the sūkta was ritually used in the remarkable ceremony called Ṣaṣṭhī-Kalpa² (goddess Ṣaṣṭhī, associated with new-born children, is identified with a lady called padmacārinī, who moves in the lotus [i.e. Lakṣmī] in other chapters³) and this usage reflects upon the fertilising aspect of Śrī-Lakṣmī. Part of the procedure of the coronation, as contained in the Baudhāyana Grhya Sūtra, is a propitiation of this goddess with the Śrīsūkta,⁴ and we know that in the popular episode in which Śrī-Lakṣmī is born from the ocean of milk, while being consecrated (consecration forms a part of the coronation), gods and sages receive

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1. Baudh.Gr.SSūt., III, 12; III, 5; cf: also the Rgvidhāna, II, 18-19.
 2. Śrīmaitrayāṇīya Mānava Gr.Sūt., I, 10, 15; Ṣaṣṭhī is called Kamā, Kamapatnī, II, 13, 6.
 3. padmacārinīyaticarā padmā padmavatīti ca / cāraṭi gandhamūla ca lakṣmih śreṣṭha sapuṣkara, Rājanirghaṇṭu, iv, 90.
 4. Baudh.Gr.SSūt., I, 23, 8ff; this thus emphasises her Rājalakṣmī aspect.

her uttering verses from the Śrīsūkta (tām tuṣṭuvurmudā yuktāḥ śrīsūktena maharṣayaḥ).¹ The Kāśyapa-jñāna-kāṇḍam of the Vaikhāṇasa school, believed to be a portion of the Kāśyapa Saṃhitā which has a dhyāna of Śrī with the epithets padmaprabhā (of the hue of the lotus), padmāmālādhara (wearing a lotus garland), padmākṣī (of lotus like eyes), padmahastā (with lotus in her hands), also prescribes that homage to her should be made with the Śrīsūkta, i.e. with the recitation of verses from the Śrīsūkta (śriyam padmaprabhām ... śrīsūktena homaṃ kuryāt).²

Religious treatises prescribe the use of this sūkta for all rites and rituals relating to the worship of Śrī-Lakṣmī as well as for the making and consecration of her images. In the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka,³ the verse 'gandhadvārā' is used during the time of sanctifying the lumps of earth at the time of her ritual bathing. But elsewhere the mantra 'gandhadvārā' is used during

1. Viṣ.P., I, 9, 100; Padm.P., Srṣṭ.Kh., 4, 60.

2. Kāś. Saṃh., jñāna kāṇḍa, ch.vii.

3. Taitt.Ār., x, i, 43; cf: Baudh.Gr.ŚSūt., II, 5; lv, 20.

Śrī-Lakṣmī's invocation and the verse starting with hiranyavarṇām is her dhyāna mantra. The Agni Purāṇa gives a detailed account of the Śrī-Lakṣmī worship. According to this text, the Lakṣmī śilā should be laid down by reading out the Śrīsūkta (śrisūktaṃ ca tathā śilā samsthāpya).¹ Then while the image is being consecrated, the eyes are endowed with sight by reciting the verse that begins with hiranyavarṇām harinīm; the offering of the madhura-traya (sugar, honey and clarified butter) is to be performed by reading out the verse beginning with tāṃ ma āvaha; elephants sprinkling water from the uplifted jars held by their trunks anoint her from all the eight sides with the help of eight different verses from the sūkta.² Even when founding a temple, this sūkta is said to be uttered in her honour. (All these prescriptions again prove the authentic originality of the first fifteen verses as none of the second half of the sūkta has been recommended by these texts in

1. Ag.P., 41, 8.

2. Ib., 62, 3-6.

connection with the worship of Śrī-Lakṣmī).¹ And when Viṣṇu was accorded the position of the husband of the goddess, the Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā finds traces of their cohabitation inherent in the sūkta and prescribes that, from now onwards, this as well as every other sūkta, even if it refers to one of them, should be considered as being dedicated to both:-

tadetat sūktamityuktam mithunam pariciphitam
ādāvanyonya miśratvādanyonya pratipādakam 2

The Lotus

But not only in the case of Śrī-Lakṣmī's ritualistic worship, even in the development of her iconography, this sūkta has played a part of great importance. Most of her iconographic traits seem to have been derived from this well-known short text.

Śrī-Lakṣmī, the goddess is invoked in the sūkta through Agni Jātavedas, the sacrificial fire, to bestow

1. Cf: Baudh.Gr.SSūt., 1, 15, 6- śrisūktena pañcadaśarcena havirjuhoti iti śrisuktam 'hiraṇyavarṇam harinim' iti pañcadaśarcam; Rajanirghaṇṭu, iv, 133, puṣkaradiyuta nadi prokta pañcadaśahvayo.

2. Cf: Ahir.Saṃh., 59, 40-42.

on her devotees gold and domestic animals, to vouchsafe health and wealth, good harvest, beauty, fame, i.e. everything that is desired and coveted by human-beings. The verses associate her with the lotus flower in every possible way - the lotus which is considered to be the highest and purest of spiritual conceptions, which represents the true perfection and is one amongst the eight mangalas or 'signs of good luck'. Thus she is described as of the colour of the lotus, seated on a lotus, wearing a lotus garland and thereby known as the lotus lady or the lady of the lotuses, the highest type of womanhood (Padmini).¹

In the fourth verse, she is addressed as 'Padmesthitā' (being on a lotus) and this might have accounted for the evolution of her image having the lotus as her seat or as her pedestal (padmāsana, padmapīṭha). Of course, even now, most of the deities are represented seated on a lotus, but it is "Śrī Lakṣmī," says Coomaraswamy, who "is the earliest divinity to be constantly represented

1. padminiṁ padmalatarūpām padmakarāṇvā. (Sāyaṇa).

with padmapīṭha or padmāsana.¹ There are other early occurrences no doubt, but none of them is pre-Kuṣāṇa. It was during the Gupta period that this padmāsana or padmapīṭha became quite conventional with most of the divine beings.²

But how could the lotus, in view of its seeming frailty, be represented as the support of the divinities or divine animals? The answer lies in its true interpretation.

In the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa and other texts, the lotus has already achieved a symbolic character, representing the waters. 'The lotus means the water and this earth is a leaf thereof, even as the leaf here lies spread on the waters so this earth lies spread on the waters.'³ At another place, the lotus leaf is

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1. Coomaraswamy, A.K.: Yakṣas, II, p. 57. For Lakṣmī on lotus, cf: Mathurā coins of late 3rd century B.C.; Pañcāla coins; Taxilā coins in Allan's (John) CCAI.; representation of Lakṣmī on the Buddhist stūpas of Bherhut and Sāñchī, etc.; Foucher, A: 'On the iconography of the Buddha's nativity', Masi, XLVI, 1934.
 2. Cf: Coomaraswamy, A.K.: 'Śrī Lakṣmī', E.A., vol. 1, 1929, p. 179, n.8.
 3. Ś.Br. vii, 4, 1, 8.

said to be the water.¹ In the Yajurveda,² it is said of the lotus, 'Thou art the back of the waters.' Thus the fundamental idea "as expressed in later Vedic literature and in the early iconography is that of the waters, as the support, both ultimate and physical, of all life and specially of the earth, whence there follows naturally the use of āsana and pīṭha."³

The same idea prevails in later literature. Thus, the Harivaṃśa,⁴ dealing with the origin of all existence from the lotus (puṣkara), refers to it as giving a seat to the goddess Earth, "as containing the abodes of all the gods and the perfect and beautiful beings. From its calyx or innermost part flows a fluid like 'amṛta' of the gods ... Thus the supreme being had made the lotus to contain the universe, he, the universal lord, of incomparable might, created or rather emanated, from himself on his couch in the great ocean, this lotus treasure which was the world."⁵ Here the last line

1. Ib., X, 5, 2, 6.

2. YV., IV, 1, 3, 1; 2, 8, 1-2.

3. Motichandra : 'Our lady of beauty and abundance: Padmaśrī', JUPHS., XXI, 1948, p.26.

4. Hariv., III, 123.

5. Gonda, J., AEV., p.104, n.52.

conveys the sense of earth as well.

In the Taittīriya Saṃhitā also, the idea of the lotus flower seems to symbolise the earth (it is the symmetry and the regularity of the lotus, eight- or sixteen-petalled, which has made it the symbol of the universe). Thus the lotus is hers and she is the lotus and the earth, at once the source and support of all existences,¹ and these as well as the fact that it seems to originate from nothing or from the water only and is therefore avayambhū, might well account for the use of the full-blown lotus as the typical basis or support of a column or a figure.²

1. Taitt.Saṃh., III, 1, 11, 3. Cf: Sāyana's commentary on it.

2. Coomaraswamy, A.K.: Yakṣas, 11, p. 57. It is significant that in certain representations, the lotus of the seat or the pedestal rises straight from a full vessel possibly as a symbol of prosperity and abundance, as the full vessel or the pūrṇa ghaṭa is one of the eight auspicious signs of good luck. In this context we may refer to Bosch who finds this ghaṭa as the substitute par-excellence of the chief organ of the lotus, the padma-mūla. The reason of such a replacement, according to him is the equivalence of the ghaṭa with the mūla both in form and in contents. He has shown by figures that at first it was the spherical root of a purely vegetal nature (Fig. 14a) passing on to a small pot gradually (14b & c). The contents of the pot are water or some other liquid belonging to soma group, consisting of the life giving, regenerating, abundance and fertility bestowing rasa which, as amṛta, is contained in the padmamūla. This resemblance, both as to forms and contents has made the pūrṇa ghaṭa the truest counterpart, the most perfect symbol of the lotus root and

Apart from being addressed as padmesthitā, Lakṣmī is also called padminī which may be interpreted as the lotus itself, and this recalls the line quoted on the previous page that the lotus is "at once the source and support of all existences"¹, particularly the source of life and support of the earth. The lotus as giving support to the earth has been discussed above and as a source, another aspect of the flower is revealed. In this aspect, the lotus represents the force and energy inherent in the waters and the humidity of the soil. "According to Hindu conception, the waters are female, they are the maternal procreative aspect of the absolute, and the cosmic lotus is their generative organ."² Thus

Footnote 2 continued from previous page.

invested with all the beneficial powers inherent in Hiranya-garbha. Thus the pūrṇa kalaśa is credited with the power to fulfil all the desires and to produce all kinds of treasures and this is prominent not only in literature but also in the artistic representations of it. (Bosch, F.D.K., The golden germ, pp.110-2; 117-9). Later it was known as Lakṣmī-ghaṭa and its mode of occurrence suggests that it may be an aniconic representation of Lakṣmī. In some places, people draw two eyes on a ghaṭa and worship it as a Devī.

1. Cf: Bosch, F.D.K.: Golden germ, p.118, where he finds a complete identity of the meaning of the syllable Śrī and the meaning of the padmamūla seen as the receptacle of the amṛta liquid, and consequently as the sum of the all properties inherent in the idea of Śrī.
2. Zimmer, H.: Myths & Symbols, p.90; cf: Bosch, Ib., pp. 81-2. He interprets the Satapatha Brāhmanic passage

/Continued over

water being regarded as female substance or 'concept', the lotus, identified or associated with similar creative entities of a female character, could explain the Rgvedic idea of the birth of Vasiṣṭha and Agni and also the myth which made this flower the birth place of Śrī and Brahmā. It is the first product of the creative principle and this lends significance to the myth of its origin from the highest being. It acts as the womb of the creation, the womb of the universe.¹

This association of Śrī with the lotus, (the plant springing from the mud and slime) and consequently with

Footnote 2 continued from previous page.

"The lotus is the waters" (vii,4,1,8) and explains it as the source as he states that the lotus is rasa, "the magic substance drawn from the waters which is virtually one with natural life itself, both when this life is a negation of sickness, old age and death, and when it manifests itself in the fertility of women, of fields and cattle, thus causing an abundance of offspring, crops, livestock and earthly riches ...". He says that all the living creatures as well as the plants "draw their sap from, the same life giving source, the rasa of the waters. This rasa in its purest form being present in and being symbolised by the lotus, ... it follows that the lotus may assume, and also may produce, all forms of life."

1. Gonda, J.: A E V., p. 104.

water (the source of life), identifies her as a deity of fertility, the character in which she is still venerated. Miss Hartmann also confirms this character of hers and other phenomena related to it (Fruchtbarkeit, Fülle, Glück).¹ In fact her cult, in mythology as well as in iconography, shows a variety of traits especially associated with the deities of fertility and prosperity. Offerings are made to Śrī at the head of the bed presumably as the goddess of fertility.² This also reminds one of her identification with Ṣaṣṭhī, the goddess of childbirth. Even today, she retains this particular characteristic as women venerate her in order to get offspring.³

Later Buddhist and other sectarian developments have attached a sense of purity to the lotus, quite

1. Cf: Gonda, J., AEV., p.213.

2. In Muslim Java, even now, the decorated bridal bed which is adorned and kept apart ceremonially, is described as the bed of Śrī. Cf: also Manu, III,89.

3. Crooke, W., Folklore of N.India, II, pp.99-100. In Rajputana, vows are made under the pipal trees for male offspring and the tree is said to be touched only on Sundays when Lakṣmī abides in it.

reasonably, as is evinced from the fact that it is not wetted by the water that it rests on, nor is the flower defiled by the mud from which it springs up.¹ Here we can recall a passage in the Harivaṃśa² which describes the lotus as golden, gold being another token of incorruptible nature; in the Śrīsūkta Lakṣmī is addressed as Hiraṇmayīm³ (golden) which also symbolises purity.

The word Padminī can also be interpreted as provided with a lotus flower⁴ (padminīm karadhṛtakamalāmiti ;⁵ Padminīm ... padmakarāṇvā [Sāyaṇa]) and thus might explain the occurrence of numerous Lakṣmī images with the lotus in her hands.⁶ Here we may refer to the Saurāṣṭra

1. Coomaraswamy, A.K.: Yakṣas, II, p.57.

2. Hariv., III, 11, 16.

3. Śrī S., 1, 13.

4. Astiyarthavācakah

5. Prthivīdharācārya bhāṣyam, Śrīsūktam, p.13.

Index VIII, 4.

6. Lakṣmī on ancient Indian Coins, cf: Allan, J., CCAI., / Lakṣmī on the Buddhist monuments, cf: Marshall, J. and Foucher, A., The monuments of Sanchi, III; Sirimā devatā, Age of Imp. Unity, p.1, xvi, fig.35, etc.

Silpa Sāstra which proclaims the girl with a lotus in her hand (haste līlākamalam) as padminī whose concrete representation is in the possession of the Mathurā Museum.¹ Again, the appellation puṣkarinī denotes the sense of abounding in lotuses and thus may have inspired the Kamalavāsini motif of Śrī-Lakṣmī.²

Even her outward appearance is compared to the lotus in every possible way. She is padmavarṇā (of a complexion like that of the hue of lotus) and that is why she is ādityavarṇā (i.e. of the colour of that of the sun), she is jvalantīm (shining brightly), prabhāsā (splendid), piṅgalām³ (tawny brown) etc. While explaining the word 'lakṣmī' Sāyaṇa refers to the Nirukta 'lakṣmīr-..... lākṣā lakṣaṇāt',⁴ (Lakṣmī, because of the distinctive mark of lākṣā, 'lāc')

1. Agrawala, V.S., Masterpieces of Mathurā Sculpture, p.21, fig.IX.

2. Whitehead, R.B., P.M.C., pl.X, f.20.

3. Śrīs., 1,4,6,13, etc.

4. Naigamakāṇḍe, IV,10.

and in the three emanations of Mahālakṣmī, Śrī embodies the 'rajo guṇa' in which the Lakṣmī image would have a red complexion. The later inserted verses also compare her to the lotus flower in every particular feature (padmākṣī, padmaūru, etc.)¹, and it is obvious that a deity who "in person ... embodies the conception of beauty and abundance, inseparably ideas that are the characteristics of Indian art from first to last", and that a goddess of fertility "cannot have been thought of as otherwise than beautiful".²

Now all these particulars taken together (i.e. Śrī's association with the lotus)³ as well as the fact that she herself is called padminī⁴ (which as has been discussed above also means 'provided with a lotus'), suggest that the idea of the birth of Śrī-Lakṣmī originated

1. Śrīs., verse 18.

2. Coomaraswamy, A.K., 'Śrī-Lakṣmī', EA., vol. 1, p.181.

3. Cf: tasmin padme bhagavati sāksāt śrīrṇityamevahi lakṣmīstavo sadāvaso murtimatya na saṁsayah, Vā.P., 39, 8.; padmam lakṣmigrhe cinham, Viṣdh.P., III, 94, 40.

4. Śrīs., verse 5.

from her identification with the lotus. As a lotus is born of the waters (saroja, abja), so was she. Moreover, another of her appellations, ārdra, which means wet or moist, and which has been commented upon by Sāyana as 'kṣīrodadherutpannatvāt' (because of her origin from the ocean of milk), also enhances the possibility of this hypothesis.¹

This popular story of the emergence of Lakṣmī from the ocean is mentioned in both the Epics² as well as in the Purāṇas:-³

tatah sphurat kāntimati vikāsi kamalesthita
srirdevi payasās tasmād utthita dhṛta paṅkajā
gāṅgādyāṃ saritastoyaiḥ snānārtham upatasthire
diggaja hemapātrasthamādāya vimalam jalam
snāpyayāṅca krire devīm sarvaloka-maheśvarīm⁴

'Then emerged beautiful Śrīdevī, on a blooming lotus, holding a lotus in her hands, from the water while the Ganges and the other streams arrived with water for bath and the elephants of the quarters, holding golden pitchers,

1. Ārdra also denotes the sense of 'soft with love or sympathy' and it is in conformity with Śrī's motherly nature.

2 & 3. Cf: the chapter on iconography.

4. Viṣ.P., 1,1x, 100.

poured a lustral bath on her.' Thus the verses depict her in her famous Abhiṣeka Lakṣmī form.

THE ELEPHANTS

The elephants, vessels and water, as they are found in the Abhiṣeka Lakṣmī composition, taken altogether, represent clouds and rains, necessary to bring a good harvest. Indra's elephant Airāvata¹ is used to designate both the rainbow and a certain type of lightning, the two most luminous manifestations of thunderstorm and rain.² The Hastyāyurveda states that in a yearly ritual devoted to rainfall, the fertility of crops and the fecundity of cattle and soil, elephants and cosmic female principle should be revered, for otherwise, the whole realm would perish. It was possibly due to its association with the life giving rain and eventually with Lakṣmī, the Indian deity of agriculture, that the elephants found a prominent place

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1. Airāvata is the name of a mythical serpent (nāga), AV., viii, 10, 29. Later the word nāga was used to mean elephant as well as cloud. Elephants were also designated as megha (cloud).
 2. Zimmer, H.: Myths and Symbols, p.104; Williams, M.M., SED., p.234 (c).

in such a ritual. It is also said in that text that elephants bestow upon people all the earthly blessings that Śrī-Lakṣmī, fertile and abundant with riches, has in store.¹

As for the significance of the vessel, the explanation of Sāyaṇa on 'utsa' (literally, source), in the Atharva Veda² may be cited, which he interprets as "utsopamam Kalaśam" - 'a jar full of water ... held in the sky ... yielding nourishing water ... beautiful.'³ The keen observation of Coomaraswamy traces Vedic elements in this: "There are more 'Vedic' elements in early Indian art than has yet been realised. To take another example, the inverted vessel is already used as a rain-cloud symbol in the Rgveda."⁴ He also

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1. Hastyāyurveda, iv, 22, where the elephants are called Śrī-gaja. When the elephants are regarded as cloud, an archaeological evidence from the ancient prākāra of Jagayyapeṭa may be cited, where clouds, as a direct source of wealth, are represented as raining coins., cf: Burgess, J., Amarāvati and Jagayyapeṭa, pl. lv., 3.
 2. AV., XVIII, 4, 36. Sahasradhāram śatadhāramutsam ...
 3. Coomaraswamy, A.K.: 'Śrī-Lakṣmī', E.A., vol. 1, 1929, p. 185.
 4. RV., V, 8, 3-4; cf: Coomaraswamy, A.K., I H Q., VI, p. 374, n.

adds that 'these compositions are comprehensible only with reference to Vedic notions, and that early Indian art is essentially the continuation of a mainly aniconic 'Vedic' style."¹

Thus undoubtedly the streams falling from the elephants' trunks are those of the life-giving rains which bring with them the heavenly soma, the source of increase and wealth. The scene may thus depict the fertilising by rains of a female being, representing or connected with the earth or her fields.²

This form of Lakṣmī, known as Abhiṣeka-Lakṣmī, became better known as Gaja-Lakṣmī, because of the accompanying elephants, the motif remaining the same.

This association with the elephants recalls a passage in the Śrīsūkta where the goddess is described as hastināda pramodinīm (taking delight in the sound of the elephants), a more acceptable reading being hastināda prabodinīm³

1. Coomaraswamy, A.K., Elements of Buddhist Iconography, p.22.
2. Lakṣmī as Bhūdevī, the magical ground or substance of existence, fertilised by heavenly showers.
Cf: tām smared abhiṣekārdraṁ pustidāṁ pustirūpinīm śritatva as quoted in the Śrīsuktam, p.29. The same text also says about the Kalāṣa 'Suvarṇo kalāṣau tābhyāṁ trptipūrṇāmbhōsā'nvaham', Ib.
3. Śrīs., verse 3.

(whose [Lakṣmī's] presence is announced by the sound of the elephants)¹ and thus describes her as an army moving to victory, emphasising her rājyaśrī or more reasonably vijayaśrī aspect. In fact, it is the royal element in an elephant that inspires such an association; as the elephant always moves with the wealthy, its presence betokens Śrī-Lakṣmī. But primarily it seems to be the cosmic symbolism of the elephants as diggaja that was most efficacious in this regard.²

The Bilvafruit

Another of the essential attributes of Lakṣmī in iconography is the bilva fruit (aegle marmelos) and the Śrīsūkta ascribes this tree to her for the first time,

1. According to some this passage as a definite proof of her close association with the elephants marks her as a deity of non-Aryan origin.
2. In this context, another appellation of Śrī-Lakṣmī, puṣkarinīm (verse 13) may be taken into account. According to Sāyana, the word puṣkara (normally blue lotus) also denotes the sense of gajaśundāgra, i.e. the tip of an elephant's trunk and thus puṣkarinīm conveys the idea of a female being at the tip of an elephant's trunk, which could have influenced the Gaja-Lakṣmī concept, (gajaśundaravācakah: puṣkarinīm abhiṣekodyuktam diggaja sundayeti bhāvaḥ). But it seems to be rather a late interpretation.

'ādityavarṇe tapaso'dhi jāto vanaspatistava vrkṣo'tha bilvah'¹ (O Sun coloured one, by reason of thy austerities (tapas), your tree came into being to wit the bilva tree). In the Rājanirghaṇṭu, it is known as Lakṣmī-phala.² The Manu Samhitā describes it as Srīphala.³

Srīphala has been interpreted as the fruit par excellence.⁴ Its roundish form and the golden hue⁵ may have made it a symbol of fortune and riches, qualities which could link it with Srī-Lakṣmī. Another explanation for this association may be the use of the bilva as a cure for barrenness, Lakṣmī being a deity of fertility.⁶

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1. Srīs., 6; 'bilvo lakṣmyābhikare'bhavat' iti Vāmana Purāṇe Kātyāyanavacanāt (Sayana). 'bilvatarurjāto lakṣmīdakṣiṇahastataḥ', Skandakumāra Samhitāyaṃ bilvamāhātmye, as quoted in the Srīsūktam, p.17; cf: Srivrkṣa iti vikhyāto bilva', Ib.
 2. Rājanirgh, I, 106-107; XXIII, 1.
 3. Manu., V, 1200.
 4. Mallmann, M.T.: Les enseignements iconographique de l'Agni P., p.264.
 5. Phalaiḥ suvarṇa saṅkāśaiḥ, Vā.P., 37, 11.
 6. Even today, women of Bihar and U.P., embrace and worship this tree in order to get their desires fulfilled. Sengupta, S.: Tree symbol worship, pp. 7-8.

Various texts ascribe different rules for the use of a bilva tree to bring forth fortune and prosperity.¹ The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa² states that one who desires food (anna), increase or well-nourished condition (puṣṭi), should make a sacrificial post of bilva wood,³ this part is a rūpa 'material form, sensuous appearance' representative of food, covered from the very root, thus presenting a form of puṣṭi (Śrī is addressed as puṣṭi in the thirteenth verse). If one with this knowledge makes such a post, he prospers (puṣyati), becomes the śreṣṭha of his own people and the light amongst them as it is said, bilva is light (jyotis). It is also known as Vrddhināmauṣadha, the herb called after prosperity. By offering it, one may get gold.⁴

According to the prescriptions laid down in the Rgvidhāna,⁵ an oblation of bilva is to be performed with

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1. Śrīpriyam yo'rcayed bilvaṃ sa nara bhāgyavān bhavet, Sk.Sena Kum. Samhitāyām bilva mahātmya, Srisuktam, p. 17.
 2. Ait.Br., II,1,6 ff.
 3. Cf: Taitt. Samh., II,1,8,1-2; S.Br., 1,3,3,20.
 4. AV. Parisiṣṭa, XXXI,6,4.
 5. Rgvidhāna, II,19,3ff; cf: Gonda, J.: Rgvidhāna, p.51.

the stanza ādityavarṇe when the fuel of the fire must contain the wood of the bilva tree, which thus ensures endless fortune. In the same text it is said¹ that one who offers lotus flowers and bilva fruits to Śrī will obtain the very desire with which in mind he made the offering.²

In the Matsya-Purāṇa, Bilva-patrikā is a goddess enshrined in a temple at a place called Bilvala³ and Bilvā is a goddess following Bhavamālinī who is a śakti from Nṛsiṃha's Guhya.⁴

According to the Vāyu Purāṇa,⁵ Śrīvanam is said to be Bilvavanam, situated to the east of Śrīsaras. According to the Varāha Purāṇa,⁶ the lotus that is borne by Śrī grows in the neighbourhood of a vast bilva forest. In later times, a number of myths arose around this

1. Ib., II, 20, 5.

2. cf: Gonda, J., Rgvidhāna, p. 52.

3. Mat.P., 13, 31.

4. Ib., 179, 68 and 71.

5. Vā.P., 37, 5-15.

6. Var.P., 79, 1 ff.

association of Lakṣmī with the bilva.¹

ALAKṢMĪ

The Śrīsūkta also asserts the efficacy of the bilva in dispelling evil or Alakṣmī when it says tasya phalāni tapasā nudantu yā antarā yāśca bāhyā alakṣmīh,² 'its (the bilva tree's) fruits must, through (the power of) thy favour, remove all the (illusions³ and) evil fortune (alakṣmī), be they internal or external'.⁴ (The Sāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka also contains a hymn in praise of the virtues of bilva as an amulet.⁵) Thus the bilva

1. Cf: Sengupta, S., 'Tree symbol worship in India', pp. 110, 130, etc.

2. Śrīs., verse 6. Alakṣmī is called Jyeṣṭhā, that is the elder sister and this relationship is first found in the Kārttika Māhātmya of the Sanat Kumāra Saṁhita, cf: Hall, Fitz-Edwards, 'The Śrīsūkta or Litany to Fortune', JASB., XXVIII, 1859, p.131.

3. Gonda, J. tries to interpret it as 'illusion' as in certain manuscripts mā occurs before yā. Gonda, J., AEV., pp. 197-98.

4. madāśritāntargata bāhyā lakṣmīrūpadurgatīssarvā, Prthivīdharācārya bhāṣyam, Śrīsūktam, p.15; antara antarindriya sambandhiniḥ māyā ajñānam tat kāryāni ca / bāhyāḥ bahirindriya sambandhinyāḥ yā staḥ alakṣmīḥ asriyāḥ nudantu apanudantu nivārayant-vityarthāḥ // Srividhyāranya bhāṣyam, Śrīsūktam, p.15.

5. Sām.Ār., XII, 20 et seq.

which is dear to Lakṣmī is effective in striking off jyeṣṭhā¹ (elder) Alakṣmī, which is always a power in opposition to Lakṣmī. There are many later episodes of dissension between Lakṣmī and Alakṣmī.

The Mahābhārata says that Alakṣmī, Lakṣmī's inauspicious opposite, went to the Asuras and Lakṣmī came to the gods. The Asuras, pervaded by Alakṣmī and struck by Kali (the age), were destroyed.² In the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa 'She' (Śrī) 'is good fortune herself in the dwellings of men of good deeds, ill fortune in those of men of sinful souls', yā śrīḥ svayaṁ sukṛtināṁ bhavane śyālakṣmīḥ pāpātmanāṁ.³

1. Śrīrpragutpannābhityarthah 1 (Śāyana).
2. In the Līṅga Purāṇa, at the time of the churning of the ocean, Alakṣmī rises before Lakṣmī and henceforth is called Jyeṣṭhā Alakṣmī, the elder sister (Uttārdha, 6th ch.).
2. Mbh. III, 94, 9 ff.
3. Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, IV, 4. cf: In the Atharva Veda (VII, 120, 4) we find mention of Punya Lakṣmī and Papī Lakṣmī, ramantāṁ punya-lakṣmīryā papistā aninaśam, the latter corresponding to Alakṣmī. Alakṣmī was named Kālakāṇṇī in ancient folk religion and is mentioned in the Jātakas where she has an argument with Siri. Cf: J., III, 257, ff; J. IV, 378. In Mahārāṣṭra folklore, she is Akkabāī, the goddess who brings ill fortune and destruction.

KUBERA

The lotus, Śrī-Lakṣmī's regular attribute, is often depicted as a direct source of wealth, as we find in the case of the Ratnamañjarikās of Bhārhut and Sāñci¹ and the padmanidhi of Kubera.² Kubera seems to be first found in association with Śrī in the Śrī-Sūkta which refers to him as 'devasakhaḥ'. As Kubera, the chieftain of the Yakṣas, is the god of riches, this association is quite appropriate. Gonda ventures to establish this relation by citing a Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa passage which states that one attains śreyas if certain rites are performed in the north, and as Kubera is the regent of the north, the connection between śreyas and the north should be as that of Śrī and Kubera.³

In this context, a passage from the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa may be cited with regard to the enumeration of the aṣṭanidhi, i.e. 'the eight treasures' which states that the eight nidhis, which are particularly associated

1. Coomaraswamy, A.K.: Yakṣas, II, pp, 4, 11, 13.

2. Ib., p. 57, pl. 1 & 46, fig. 1. cf: Mārkaṇḍeya, LXVIII, 5.

3. Gonda, J.: ABV., p. 202; cf: S.Br., IV, 5, 8, 11.

with Kubera, are the ādhāras of Padminīvidhyā whose presiding deity is Lakṣmī, 'padminīnāmāyā vidyā Lakṣmīstasyādhidevatā'.¹

Another link with Kubera is provided by the Kalpadruma capital in the form of a banyan tree which was recovered from Besnagar. Bags and pots of treasures are arranged beneath the foliage with a conchshell and a lotus flower exuding coins, correctly identified by Coomaraswamy with two of the nidhis of Kubera, śaṅkha and padma. This banyan capital, which can be dated back to the third century B.C., "have originally been placed on the top of a column standing in front of a shrine of Kubera whose cognisance was a vase full of coins".² But another explanation has been offered by Banerjea who suggests that it could have been placed in front of a shrine of Śrī who was the presiding deity of the Padminī Viḍyā, associated with these śaṅkha and padma and other six nidhis. The Besnagar Yakṣiṇī, with the plaited hair, elaborate girdle and mekhalā characteristic of Sūṅga workmanship, may really stand for Śrī.³

1. Mārk.p., ch.LXVIII,4.

2. Banerjea, J.N., DHI.,p.105,f.n.1.

3. Ib.,pp.104-5.

Concrete evidence of the existence of the Pañcarātra cult, with which Śrī-Lakṣmī is intimately associated, has been found at Besnagar.¹

This association of Śrī with Kubera appears in the later parts of the Epic as well as in the Purāṇas. The Mahābhārata, in describing the sabhā of Kubera, says that Lakṣmī always stays there, as does Kubera's son Nalakubera² (who is brought up with superlative ease, atyanta sukhasamvṛddha).³ Kubera is also united with Lakṣmī,⁴ who is, however, not yet his wife. In the Nārada Purāṇa,⁵ she is explicitly referred to as Kubera's consort. Kubera is believed to be in possession of Śrī, which belongs to him as tejas belongs to the sun, Kṣamā to the Earth and anger to Yama.⁶

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1. Ib., p.374; another capital of the same period representing a makara found at Besnagar itself is associated with a temple of Kāmadeva. cf: C.Sivaramamurti, Ind.Sculp., p.21.
 2. Mbh., II, 10, 19.
 3. Ib., VII, 46, 12.
 4. Ib., III, 168, 13. rājañllakṣmyā.
 5. Nārada p., 84, 12.
 6. Gonda, J.: AEV., p.195.

Thus it seems that first it was the abstract concept of Śrī, (i.e. Kubera has Śrī which is material prosperity [as man is said to 'become śreyam' or 'reach śreyas' not morally but materially] Śrīda [bestower of wealth or prosperity] being a name of Kubera)¹ that associated her with Kubera. With the development of her concrete image, she became his consort.

Quite a few archaeological remains indicate some sort of connexion between Śrī and the king of the Yakṣas. Thus we find her represented from a very remote period on stūpas and railings in Bhārhut and Sāñchi and at other places in the company of Yakṣas and Yakṣinīs. Śrī's iconographic features are also similar to those of Yakṣinīs. The Yakṣas are well known as protectors who can fight fiercely while Lakṣmī is also well renowned as a guardian deity, in particular as a protectress of the door, in her Sāmānyā-Lakṣmī aspect.² As such she is represented at Sāñchī, Bhārhut, Amarāvātī,

1. Cf: AEV., pp. 195, 209. Śriyā vaiśravanopamaḥ, Mbh., II, 17, 15.

2. Cf: Mallmann, M.T., Ag.p., p. 185; Buddhist texts also contain numerous references to the goddess Śrī, in many of which she is described as Devakumarikā and associated with the northern and southern quarters, cf: Barua, B.M. and Sinha, Bharhut Ins., p. 74.

Begām, Bodhgayā and other places.

On certain seals of the Gupta period from Basārḥ, dwarf figures holding objects identifiable with money-bags are found beside the Gajalakṣmī symbol. In some cases, they are even pouring out small round objects which may be coins.¹ The dwarf figures, according to T. Bloch, represent Kubera, but Banerjea thinks them to be Yakṣas, the custodians of riches, the idea being that they dole out riches to those who are specially favoured by this goddess.

There are certain other representations where Lakṣmī is sculptured beside Kubera himself. Thus an early mediaeval sculpture shows a female and a male figure seated side by side in Lalitāsana. The female figure is invariably Śrī-Lakṣmī as is indicated by the miniature elephants surmounting rising lotuses and emptying inverted jars. A miniature vase is below the left knee of the goddess. The pot-bellied male figure on the left holds a bowl in the right hand (the left one is damaged), these two features proving himself to be no-one but Kubera. This probably indicates that Lakṣmī was once looked upon

1. Banerjea, J.N., DHI., pp.209-211, pl.X, Fig.2.

as his consort.¹

On another specimen, the figure of Gaṇeśa (the giver of success) appears beside Lakṣmī and Kubera. Here Lakṣmī, seated in between them, is as usual in her Gajalakṣmī pose, holding two lotuses the stalks of which rise from two vases placed on the two sides of her lotus seat, on the flowers of which are two elephants performing the abhiṣeka with upturned jars. Kubera holds a drinking cup and a purse. From the stylistic point of view, it can be said to belong to the early mediaeval period.²

A similar combination of these three deities can be found in another sculpture from Abaneri (situated about 50 miles from Jaipur and only four miles to the

✓ 1. V.S. Agrawala, CBIMM, p.50, fig.223.

2. Ib., p.49, Mus.No.1119. Cf: the pot belly of Kubera and Gaṇeśa and of all the Yakṣas, according to Bosch, originated from its resemblance with the kumbha and thus indirectly with the padma-mūla, making the belly, like the original ones, container of prosperity in every enterprise', and thus they (the above mentioned personages) are characterised by the one or more rasa properties, particularly the power to bestow prosperity, fertility, abundance and offspring. These basic similarities have been effective in their association with Lakṣmī. Cf: Bosch, F.D.K., Golden Germ, p.114, pl.31d where the pitcher on the belly seems to be her own but not yet incorporated, and thus determines the close relation between the two.

east of Bandikui Railway station) where the influence of Gupta art is visible at a glance. In this relief, Lakṣmī is in her Gajalakṣmī aspect, holding a fruit beside the lotus, while Gaṇeśa and Kubera are on her right and left sides respectively. The presence of a lion under the lotus seat is note-worthy.¹

There are also some older representations, some Kuṣāṇa statuettes which have Haritī (wife of Vaiśravaṇa, counterpart of Kubera in Buddhism) and Lakṣmī, possibly as a rapprochement between Buddhism and Brahmanism.²

A statuette from Mathurā, now in the Lucknow museum, has Lakṣmī holding a lotus, Bhadrā holding a fruit and Haritī holding a child and by their side, Kubera seems to be the fourth figure (cf: since Bhadrā is his wife according to some Purāṇas, this group seems to represent his three wives together).³ Similarly, on a gold plaque from Takht-i-bahi, now in the British Museum,⁴ a female figure in long loose robe holds a bunch

1. Agrawala, R.C., 'Sculptures from Abaneri, Rajasthan', Lalit Kalā, Nos.1-2, April 1955-March 1966, p.132, fig. 5.

2. Agrawala, V.S., CBIMM., p.X.

3. *Ib.*, p.X, no.O.241.

4. Brooke Sewell Bequest, 11.12.1.



IMAGE OF ŚRĪ FROM TAKHT-I-BAHI
(BRITISH MUSEUM)

of fruits in one hand and a child seems to grab her by her dress. Possibly Śrī's equation with Haritī as the wife of Kubera has led to its identification with Śrī.

ŚRĪ AS AN ANTELOPE

The very first line of the Śrī-Sūkta describes Śrī-Lakṣmī as a golden antelope 'hiranyavarṇām harinīm'¹ adorned with gold and silver garlands. This may represent Lakṣmī in her animal form if a number of Kuninda and Yaudheya coins are taken into account.

Certain coins of the Kuninda king Amoghabhūti (whose date has been ascribed by Allan to the last half of the first century B.C.)² bear, on the obverse, a deer

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1. harinīm haritavarṇām / harinīrūpadharām vā / (Sāyana).
Yajñognirmrgarupena dhāvati sma nṛadhvare /
rūdrastvā kṛsva tacchaktim mrgim jagraha vaiṣṇavīm //
iti vaivartadaksadhavara-dhyayokteḥ / Sṛisuktam, p.4.;
harinīm tu hareḥ patrīm daridryapariharinīm /
prapadye'ham haridrābham harināksim hiraṇmayīm //
iti Atharvavanikastutau, Satananda vṛttih, Sṛisuktam,
 p.5.

In the lexicons, 'harinī' is one of the four kinds of beautiful women corresponding to the type of man termed mrga. In the Rājatarāṅginī, harinī suggests a golden image while in Buddhist literature, it is the name of a yakṣinī. cf: M.M.Williams, S E D., p.1291, (b).

2. Allan, J., CCAT., p.CIII.

to the right of the figure of a female deity who stands on a lotus, holding a lotus in her uplifted right hand; she has been identified quite conclusively with Śrī-Lakṣmī.¹ Thus these coins seem to represent the deity in her human as well as in her animal form.

This observation is corroborated by certain Yaudheya coins which are closely connected with the Kuninda coins in type and style. On a unique silver coin, a six-headed deity (Kārttikeya) stands on the obverse while Lakṣmī stands on a lotus with an aureole round her head on the reverse.² On certain other coins, the deities apparently change their places, with Lakṣmī on the obverse and Kārttikeya on the reverse;³ other coins have the representation of a deer on the obverse and Kārttikeya on the reverse, possibly thus replacing the theriomorphic form of Śrī with her anthropomorphic form.⁴

1. Ib., pl. XXII, No. 21.

2. Allan, J., GCAT., pl. XXXIX, 21, 22.

3. Ib., XL, 10.

4. Ib., XL, 12. These coins are significant from another point of view. On them, in between the horns of the deer, there is a symbol (cobra according to Allan) which might have been the origin of the Śrī-vatsa symbol. It occurs when the deer is alone and thus it may be concluded that as the symbol was native to the deer (Lakṣmī in her animal form), Śrī-vatsa

In this respect, the Purāṇic episode which depicts Śrī as moving about in the forest in the form of a deer should be noted.¹

ŚRĪ AS THE MOTHER AND GODDESS OF AGRICULTURE

Another of Śrī-Lakṣmī's essential characteristics, the mother aspect, in which she is still invoked all over India, seems to be confirmed by the Śrī-Sūkta when she is addressed as 'devīmātaram śriyam' or 'śriyam vāsaya me kule mātaram padmamālinīm'.²

Iconographic texts also emphasise this motherly aspect by ascribing to her such physical characteristics as 'fully developed breasts', narrow waist and heavy buttocks, indicative of radiant motherhood'.³ In

Footnote 4 continued from previous page.

(dear to Śrī) was evolved. This representation also reminds one of Artemis with the stag. Moreover, this association with Kārttikeya recalls the episode in the Mbh. III, 229, 50 where Śrī is the wife of Skanda and also her identification with Devasenā and Saṣṭhī, the other wives of Skanda. Cf: also Mbh., IX, 46, 64.

1. Śrīrdhrtvā harinīrūpamarāṇye samcācāraha iti Devipurnātca (Śayana).
2. Śrīs., verses 11-12.
3. Banerjea, J.N., DHI., p.373; Mat.P., 261, 40-47.

Bhārhut, she is Sirimā-Devatā. In certain representations, she is found pressing from her breasts a stream of milk.¹

The philosophical conception of Śrī as a mother-goddess is expounded elaborately in the Pañcarātra school of the early Vaiṣṇavas. She played a role of considerable importance as a mother goddess in some parts of India, specially among the Vaiṣṇavas of the south. The Śrī sect of Vaiṣṇavism laid great stress on the mother aspect of Śrī.² Sometimes, as the divine mother of all existence, she intercedes with god on behalf of men.

But the best known characteristic of Śrī-Lakṣmī, that of being essentially a goddess of agriculture, was for the first time intimated by this Sūkta.

As the tutelary deity of rice-growing India,³ she

1. Coomaraswamy, A.K., 'Śrī-Lakṣmī', E.A., vol. 1, 1929, Cf: Prajanam bhavasi matā, Śrīs., verse 20; Jaganmatā, Viṣ.ṭ., I, 8, 15 and 28.

2. S. B. D. G., Asp. of Rel. Thoughts, p.60.

3. Zimmer, MSIAC, p.91.

is associated with grains, rice-fields and harvests, with all kinds of earthly abundance. Thus, in the Śrīsūkta, she has been described as taking delight in clay and moisture (her two sons Kardama [mud], Giklīta [moisture] were actually the personifications of rich soil). Other appellations, such as nitya-puṣṭā (continually thriving or always well nourished), kariṣiṇīm¹ (abounding in dung) and gandhadvārā (perceptible through her odour), also throw some light on this aspect of Śrī-Lakṣmī, in fact the goddess is viewed here as one with the earth. Similar aspect of Lakṣmī is reflected in verse ten which runs as paśunām rūpamannasya mayi śrīḥ śrayatām yaśaḥ.

That she was essentially conceived of as a deity of agriculture, like the Roman Ceres, is further strengthened by the fact that even today, during the harvest season, great festivals are held in her honour.²

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1. Even now, dung cakes are offered at the time of the rituals (cf: Gobh.Gr.Sūtra, etc.). As dung denoted the sense of purity, everything, including the vedi (altar) is cleansed with dung. Moreover, clay and moisture, as well as dung, do act as good fertilisers and are essential ingredients of a rich soil.
 2. Encycl. of S. Asia, III ed., vol. 11, p.660; SBDG., BSSS., p.173, f.n.5.

The ceremonies may be different in different parts of India, but the aim is the same, the achievement of a good crop. As she is specially associated with rice-fields, she is known as 'Dhānya Lakṣmī' 'Dhānya Rūpā' the presiding deity of rice. Even in iconography, she is very frequently represented as holding ears of corns.¹

In Siam, Śrī is always represented with a sprig of rice or grain in her right hand, while the left hand rests on the earth with a supple curve. In Indonesia, the goddess Sīri (Sang hyang Devi Sri) is usually represented seated on a lotus and holding in her hand only a sprig of rice. Recently the bank notes of Indonesia have reproduced a beautiful old Javanese bronze figure of Śrī with the rice stalk in her left hand and the right hand in the Varamudrā. In some parts of Indonesia, where Brāhmanical and Buddhist influences make themselves felt, little shrines are found in the form of niches set upon tall altar-like structures (brick or wood) dedicated to goddess Śrī as the deity of rice crop.²

1. It is an indispensable attribute of modern Śrī-Lakṣmī images.

2. Cf: Chatterji, S.K., 'A Brahmanical deity in Indo-China and Indonesia', J.N. Banerjea Volume, pp. 90-92.

Her name is given to the last stalk of rice which the Hindus, like the Scotch, carry home and preserve until the next harvest time.¹ The people of Java and also of other islands believe that Śrī died while she was forced to submit to Viṣṇu's love, and when she was buried, several crops sprouted up from the body, the rice from her navel.² In Bali, the name of Śrīdevī is given to the rice cut but not yet thrashed.³

Thus the Śrī-Sūkta by confirming most of her fundamental aspects, dominates in the gradual manifestation of the full-fledged Śrī-Lakṣmī concept, the concept which has made her a deity of extreme popularity, venerated not by any individual sect, but by all. She was worshipped even by foreigners, as is evident from her effigy stamped on a number of coins of the

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1. Gupte, B.A., Hindu holidays ... , p.125.
 2. Gonda, J., Sanskrit in Indonesia, p.132; Hidding, K.A.H., Ndi Pohatji Sangiang Sri, p.28 f.; but in certain other texts, Sri as Tishawati, died when forced by, not Viṣṇu but Guru whose wife is Umādevī, cf: Rassers, W.H., On the Meaning of the Javanese drama in Panji, The Culture Hero, p. 17 ff. Here we may compare some late pauranic episodes where Lakṣmī was reborn as a plant. Cf: DevīBhg.P., 9th Kh., VI, 33.
 3. Scheftelowitz, I., 'Śrīsūkta', Z D M G. (75), 1921, p.39.

alien rulers like Azilese, Azes, Rajubula, Ṣodāsa¹ and others. Even the people of the Muslim community, whose religion is generally against idolatry, are said to have been the votaries of Lakṣmī in Bengal.² In the European accounts, Lakṣmī is said to be all that can be desired or imagined;³ while in Hinduism, no deity surpasses her in fame and popularity. Thurs-day (when weekly religious services are performed in her honour) is known after her as 'Lakṣmīvāra'.

1. Allan, J., CCAI., pp. 131-34; 149; 187; 190-191; 256; Whitenead, R.B., PMC., vol. 1, p.135, pl.XIII, fig. 333.

2. ~~Sh~~ Lehiri, B.C., Hindu O Muslim Dharmer Samanvaya, p. 30.

3. Caland, W., Port. Verh., p.105.

The second half of the Śrīsūkta, which is evidently a late insertion, although continuing the same appeal for wealth and abundance, betrays a different trend altogether. Here, the goddess is not invoked via Agni Jātavedas, the mediator, but is approached directly. As a legacy of the previous part of the sūkta, the lotus is still attached to her¹ and she has been explicitly attributed a birth from the lotus flower (padma sambhave)² which is a late Epic trait. The sūkta also refers to the late incident of the drinking of the soma juice by the son of Vinatā,³ and adds to Kardama and Ciklīta, two further ṛṣis, Ānanda and Śrīda.⁴ But above all these, Lakṣmī, addressed also as Mahā-Lakṣmī, has been associated with Viṣṇu (called by his different names, viz. Hari, Mādhava, Acyuta)⁵, as his beloved consort. This association, as will be discussed in later chapters, is a comparatively late trait in the history of the Śrī-Lakṣmī cult, and thus it further evinces the fact that the last fourteen verses were late compositions added to the original fifteen at a later period; what was implicit in the first half of the sūkta was expressly asserted in the later part.

1. Śrīs, vv. 17, 18, 24.

2. Ibid. v. 18.

3. Ibid. v. 22.

4. Ibid. v. 27.

5. Cf: Ibid. vv. 17, 24, 25, 26.

C H A P T E R I I I

SOME EARLY PROTO-TYPES OF ŚRĪ-LAKṢMĪ

PRTHIVI

One of the earliest prototypes of the later Sri-Lakṣmī worship may have been the cult of a Mother Goddess which is represented in the nude female terracotta figurines of the Harappa civilisation. Some of them are found carrying children and are apparently meant for worship. With these should be associated the representation of a female figurine giving birth to a tree, discovered among the ruins of the same civilisation. J. Marshall interpreted the latter as an Earth-goddess presiding over agriculture.¹ The former, with their emphasis on motherhood and their associated with children, may be identified as a kind of Mother Goddess.

The cult of the Mother Goddess is apparently closely associated with the conception of the Earth as the mother. The cult of a Fertility-goddess, which is found in a wide area of the primitive world, may as well have been a manifestation of the Earth as the mother. Such concepts of the Mother cult, the Fertility cult and the cult of the Earth as the mother may be traced back to the general ideas about the

1. Marshall, J., M.I.C., vol.I, p.52. Cf: Wheeler, M., Indus Civil., pp. 58-62; Campbell, J., The masks of god, figs. 16, 17; Zimmer, H., A.I.A., p.22. Cf: some later representations, ASIAR., 1911-12, pl.xxiii, 40.

physical manifestations of the world.¹

The reasons underlying the deification of the Earth as a mother goddess, lie in the magical nature of planting and growth. Crops often fail, and this requires a ceremonial approach to the proper placing of the seed. The earth, being the receiver of the seed and producer of the grains, was propitiated and subsequently personified and deified. Thus, it is

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1. The ancient Mexicans regarded the Moon goddess as the mother goddess who was again the Earth spirit. (Frequently the Earth Mother and the Moon goddesses, usually regarded as the wives of the Sun, are identical. Jobes, G., Dict. of Myth, Folklore and Symbols, p.485. The moon has powerful influence over the fertility of the crops. Fraser, J., G.B., II, p. 154 ff.). She was sometimes regarded as "Tlalli Ilalli" which possibly means "Significance of the Earth" S.B.D.G., BSSS., p. 17. Tacitus relates that nearly all the Germans united in worshipping Nerthus, that is to say Mother Earth, before her cult as a Mother goddess became widespread, Tacitus, Germania, p. 40. The great Mother goddess of Cretan religion appears to be an Earth goddess in origin as she has been identified not only with Rhea and Cybele (the Greek and Roman mother goddesses originating from the earth concept), but also with Demeter (supposed to have introduced agriculture, whose name is probably derived from "Ga Mater" or Earth Mother) and Gaea (the personification of the earth, whose other name is 'Titania i.e. dust; Jobes, G., Dict., p.621). The serpent form of Isis, the great mother goddess of Egypt, belongs to this category (Mackenzie, D.A., Myths of Crete and Pre-Hellenic Europe, p. 183; Leach, M., S.D.F.M.L., i, p.529) as she symbolises the rich plains of Egypt, fecundated by the inundation of the Nile, who is her consort Osiris (Larousse Encycl. of Myth., p. 19).

apparent that it is the creative energy of the goddess (the fecundity of the soil and the growth of all crops being solely dependent upon her) that contributed most to world-wide worship of the Earth. The female personification is possibly due to her universal character as bearer of fruits. The fecundity of the earth and that of woman came to be viewed as one and the same thing.¹ Thus there is the Purāṇic injunction that Pṛthivī (Earth) should be worshipped on the day of Garbhādhāna.² In fact, the conception of a female divinity connected with productivity is a common feature of most ancient societies. Isis of Egypt and Demeter of Greece may be cited as analogous instances.

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1. According to R. Briffault, the association or rather "the assimilation of the fruit bearing soil to the childbearing woman is universal" (Mothers, III, p.59). This ancient belief is based on two major aspects, i.e., the plant producing activity is viewed as depending magically on the reproductive capacity of the female body and similarly, the reproductive capacity of the female body is magically dependent on the earth. Even very recently, Indian peasant women evoked the same primitive belief as during the Gorakhpur famine of 1873-74, women of the locality, at night, stripped themselves naked, and taking the plough with them, dragged it across the fields. Chattopadhyay, D.P., Lokayata ... as cited in a paper on 'Historical materialist treatment of Hinduism' by Dale Riepe.
 2. Ag.P., XLI, 8.

The worship of Mother Earth marks man's adoption of a settled life and his earliest experiences in agriculture;¹ since India is primarily an agricultural country, it is not surprising that the mother goddess was first conceived of and worshipped as the Earth Mother.

In the fertile plains of India, the Aryans appear to have adopted agriculture as an important part of their economy, and there is ample evidence in the Rgveda of the increasing use of the plough.² That the Earth has already acquired a new and holy significance in their eyes can be seen reflected in their thought and culture:³ not only is she celebrated in the Vedic hymns, but agriculture is extolled as well.⁴

In Vedic literature, the Earth is lauded as 'Pṛthivī' (the broad one). While describing the Earth,

1. ERE., vol. V, p.4; Cf: R. Briffault's remark, "The Mother Earth has scarcely any place in the cosmological or religious conceptions and rites of peoples in the pre-agricultural stages ... Even in a highly advanced culture whose authors are non-agrarian Mother Earth plays no conspicuous role." Briffault, R., Mothers, III, p.59.
2. RV., IV, 57, 4; cf: Sira (plough) R.V., IV, 57, 8; X, 101, 3-4; cf: AV., VI, 30, 1; 91, 1; VIII, 9, 16, etc.
3. RV., VI, 51, 8.
4. RV., IV, 57, 3, 4, 7, 8.

the Taittirīya Sāmhita¹ and the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa² derive the name from the root 'prath' (to extend) as she is extended.³ A Rgvedic poet alludes to this etymology when he says that Indra upheld the Earth and spread it out (praprathat).⁴ But the Purāṇas ascribe the deed to Prthu, the illustrious king who compelled the Earth to acknowledge his authority, levelled it, introduced cultivation and erected cities, so that the Earth was called after him Prthivī.⁵

The observation of A.A. Macdonell that "the personification" of the Earth "is but slight" in the Vedas, most of her attributes are "those of the physical earth" where "she abounds in heights, bears the burden of the mountains, and supports the trees of the forests in the ground"⁶ as well as the fact that in the Rgveda,

1. Taitt.Samh., VII, 1, 5.

2. Taitt.Br., I, 1, 3, 5.

3. Macdonell, A.A.: Ved. Myth., p.88.

4. RV., II, 15, 2; OST., V, 21-22.

5. Vis.P., I, 13, 38. (Cf: Prthu is an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Mbh., XII, 59, 128f.).

6. Macdonell, A.A., Ved. Myth., p.88.

the Earth is mostly propitiated in the company of her consort Dyaus, have led scholars such as Whitney to argue that 'the earth herself makes no remarkable' figure in the circle of Vedic divinities.¹

But an analytical study of the Vedas will prove that this statement can hardly be correct. The Earth is not only regarded as the mother of men² but also as the mother of gods.³ She is stated to have created and nourished all creatures,⁴ (in thee let everything be born, what is and what is yet to be).⁵ Even after death, the Earth is a refuge,⁶ as a mother is to her child. (The belief in rebirth may have led to such a custom, although there is little evidence for rebirth in the Vedas.) The Vedic sages attributed to her "all

1. Whitney, W.D., Or. & Ling. Stud., I, p.32.

2. RV., I, 159, 2; 164,33; 185,11; AV., VII,120,2; XII, 1,10.

3. RV., I,106,3; 159,1; 185,4; VII,53,1; X,2,7; 11,9.

4. RV., I,159,2; 160,2; 185,1; X,110,9.

5. AV., XIII, 1,54.

6. RV., X,18,10-11; Cf: AV., XVIII,2,19; Āsv.Gr.Sūt., IV,5,7. At the so-called Vedic Smaśāna mount at Lauriya Nandangarh, excavated by T. Bloch, a very small gold leaf carved with the figure of a female, was discovered. Bloch described it as the representation of the Vedic Earth-goddess (Prthivī) to whose care the relations of a dead man assigned his remains. (Banerjee, J.N., DHI., p.96).

motherly feeling, tender affection, generosity of heart and forbearance".¹ Her vastness and majesty, variety and fruitfulness, inspired them to sing in her praise 'mātā Prthivī mahīyam'.²

In the Atharva Veda, in the long and beautiful Prthivī Sūkta, which is solely devoted to the praise of Mātā Prthivī, the goddess takes her full-fledged form, surpassing every other divinity in greatness. The Indians still attach the same amount of greatness to Mother Earth, as is apparent from some modern Indian literature.³ But the Mātā Prthivī of Vedic mythology differs greatly from the Mother Earth whose worship has continued to the present day.⁴

1. SBDG., Asp. Rel. Thought, p.47.

2. RV., I, 164, 33; Cf: 185, 2 and 10.

3. Tagore, R.N., Ahalyār Prati; Vasundharā; Mātīr Dāk; Patrāpūta.

4. Williams, M.M., R T L., p.182. The worship of Earth mother is still practised by the non-Hindu aboriginal tribes belonging to the Sābara and the Gond groups. Cf: OII., p.436. It is interesting to note in this connexion how the greatness of the Earth was recognised even by the Buddha. It is described in some later books (especially the Nidānakathā of the Jātaka commentary and the Buddhavamsa commentary) how, being challenged by Māra, Buddha asked the Earth to bear witness to the fact that he sat on his seat by his own right and the Earth roared in response. (J.i, 71 ff; Papañca Sūdanī, Majjhima commentary, i, 384). The account was greatly elaborated in later chronicles and illustrated in numerous Buddhist shrines and temples.

From a survey of the attributes and qualities with which the Earth is endowed in the Prthivī Sūkta,¹ it is not surprising to see that in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, she is identified with Śrī.² The reason is implicit in a statement of Mahīdhara³ who says that Śrī in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa⁴ refers to the Earth especially when it has been drenched by rain. Here again we may refer to the interpretation of the Gajalakṣmī motif which represents Śrī-Lakṣmī as Bhūdevī or the magical ground or substance of existence fertilised by heavenly showers.⁵ Thus it seems that like most of the early goddesses, Lakṣmī owed her prominence to her association with agriculture where she is conceived as the Earth-mother who brings forth the golden crop.

The original meaning of the root 'bhū' (a name of the earth) is growing, thriving, prospering,⁶ śrī

1. AV., XII, 1 ff.

2. Ait.Br., V,3,5; viii, 5, 4.

3. Comm. on Vāj. Samh., 23, 12.

4. S.Br., xiii, 2, 6, 16; cf: ii, 1,6,23 - the earth is śrī.

5. Cf: the ch. on the Śrīsūkta. Cf: Mbh., XIII, 158, 41, 'Viṣṇu then created the earth ... then the firmament for pouring copious showers of waters on the Earth.'

6. Cf: RV., i,161,1; viii, 59,7; AV., x,3,17; 6,9; xi, 7,22; 8,21, etc.; Taitt.Samh., ii, 1,1,1; 3,5.

signifies or symbolises abundance. The rare śremān (distinction) forms a pair with mehimān (greatness) where the context clearly shows that this substantive expresses a quality originating in the possession of śrī.

In fact, the Earth and Śrī are so similar in nature that it can easily lead to their identification. Lakṣmī is a goddess of prosperity associated with harvest or corn, the rice fields and all kinds of earthly abundance¹ (symbolised by the ear of corn she carries in her hands in which case she is known as Dhānyarūpā or Dhānyalakṣmī) and the Śrīsūkta, according to Gonda, is the description of Lakṣmī as the patron deity of the farmers, whereas it is well-known that a corn goddess played a conspicuous role in the elevation of the Earth as a Mother Goddess. When Lakṣmī is said to be the source of all gems and wealth,³ the Earth is addressed as Ratnagarbhā.⁴ While Lakṣmī is called

1. Zimmer, H., AIA., p.329.

2. Gonda, J., AEV., p.50 n. In this context see the chapter on the Śrīsūkta where Śrī-Lakṣmī is characterised as a deity of agriculture; Taitt.Ar. (x,1,43) refers to her as mṛttikābhīmānī devatā.

3. BV P., Prak.Kh., vii, 92-93.

4. Ib., i, 91-100; Amarakośa, ii, 1, 4.

prajānām ... mātā¹ (the mother of all created beings), the Earth is celebrated in the same manner in the Vedas;² both receive the same appellation Kṣamā;³ both are holy and eternal; abodes of sanctity and sources of gems; gems among women; full of food (Annapūrṇā); both are auspicious; sources of the universal good and the support of all beings. They are worshipped for desired objects, for wealth and honour, crops and cattle, progeny and longevity and protection from all evils. In the Nārāyaṇopaniṣad,⁵ the Earth herself seems to be praised and venerated as Śrī or Lakṣmī. They are propitiated at the same season for the same reason. So S.K. Dikshit suggests

1. Śrīs., 20.

2. RV., iv,3,5; 51,11; v,49,5; 84,1; vi,15,13-14; vii,34,23; AV., xii,1 f.

3. Amarakośa, ii,1,4; Śrīs., 25; In the Harivamśa, III,12,343, the lotus that was born of Viṣṇu's navel has been defined by the learned sages as the body of the Earth born of Nārāyaṇa. The goddess who remains seated on that lotus is the Earth and her issues are the largest mountains, etc., etc. (Langlois, A.M., Hariv., II, 2, p.304). Here we may recall Lakṣmī as a lotus, Lakṣmī seated on a lotus, Lakṣmī born of a lotus.

4. Śrīs., 19-20; 28; 29; AV., XII,1,6,8,14,22,32; 40-44; BV P., Prāk.Kh., VII, 53-64.

5. S B D.G., BSSS., p.22; Asp.Rel.Thought, p.50.

that Śrī-Lakṣmī undoubtedly represents Bhagā, the Earth-goddess.¹ Conclusive evidence for this identification may be seen in the birth of Lakṣmī as Dharanī - the Earth - when Viṣṇu was incarnated as Parāśurāma.²

Thus it is apparent that in addition to her original character as an individual goddess of agricultural prosperity, Śrī-Lakṣmī has been equated with the Earth as a śakti of Viṣṇu as well, but not only in an indirect way as suggested above. An important feature in Viṣṇuism is the appearance of Bhūdevī, the Earth, as Viṣṇu's second consort, beside Lakṣmī. According to Hartmann, the original dual personality of Śrī and Lakṣmī survives in this late representation of Viṣṇu with his two wives.³ But, as will later be seen, Bhū acquired the position in her own right.

Before being associated with Viṣṇu, the Earth

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1. Dikshit, S.K., Mother Goddess, p.123.
 2. Vis.P., 1,9,14; Cf: the Jaina story of Dharanendra, the giant serpent king, king of the earth, whose function it was to support the earth and who sometimes had Lakṣmī as his consort (Sūtrākṛtāṅga, Book i, lecture 6,20). Ananta Sesā, who dwells in pātāla and supports the whole earth with his head, is supposed to be the tāmasa form of Viṣṇu. Cf: Vis.P., ii,5,13-27.
 3. Hartmann, G., Beitrage ..., as cited in Gonda, J., AEV., p. 214.

appears as the acknowledged spouse of the Sky god, lauded in the Rgveda as Dyaus. The probable reason for this union is apparent from Vedic verses in which Mother Earth produces crops after being impregnated by rains sent by Father Dyaus.¹ Such myths of the conjugal union of the Sky and the Earth seem to be widely diffused among the primitive peoples and still prevail in many parts of the world.²

Parjanya, an aspect of the Sky-father, but specifically responsible for rain, sometimes replaces Dyaus as a consort of Prthivī. In the Atharva Veda, it is said: 'The Earth is the mother and I am the son of the Earth; Parjanya is the father, may he nourish

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1. RV., I, 71, 5; 164, 33; III, 31, 1; X, 61, 4-7. Some primitive ritual acts (cf: G.B., V, 1, 65 ff) may supply the root — in which the mother goddess in her primitive form as Earth mother appears as the bride of the Sky god or heaven. In regions where agriculture is always dependent on rains, prayers are sent up to the gods in heaven to inundate the fields (WSG., p. 20). It is in this context that the Sky god has been regarded as responsible for fructifying the soil, personified as the Earth mother with his fertilising waters. Thus Demeter, the Earth mother, is married to the Sky god Zeus and Prthivī to Dyaus. Cf: Br.Ar.Up., vi, 4, 20; 2, 2. In the marriage ceremonies, the husband says to the wife 'the heaven I, the earth thou', cf: Āsvl.Gr.Sūt., I, 7, 6; Pār.Gr.Sūt., I, 6, 3.
 2. In ancient Athens, there was an image of the Earth-goddess praying to Zeus for rain. Frazer, J., GB., The Magic Art, II, p. 359.

us': (mātē bhūmih putroṣham prthivyāḥ | parjanyaḥ pitā sau nah pipartu.)¹ Again, verse 42 of the same hymn

runs: "Reverence be paid to the Earth, the wife of Parjanya, to her who draws richness from showers,"²

(bhūm yai parjanyaḥ patnyai namo 'stu varṣamedase).

This very hymn recalls the Abhiṣeka composition of Lakṣmī.

But later Viṣṇu replaced both Dyāus and Parjanya. Thus in the Ahīrbudhnya Samhitā, Prthivī is described as prthivī vaiṣṇavī śaktiḥ prathamānā svatejasā³

"Prthivī, the Śakti of Viṣṇu, is manifest (?) with (her) own lustre'. In the Parameśvara Samhitā,⁴ Śrī and Bhū are mentioned as his two Śaktis where Bhūmi Śakti is regarded as his pustī Śakti. In the Padma Tantra,⁵ they are referred to as his two energies.

Bhūdevī and Varāha

But this Bhū Śakti concept seems to be only a later development of an earlier association between

1. A.V., xii, 1, 12.

2. Cf: OST., V, p. 23; Renou, L., Hinduism, p. 77.

3. Ahir. Samh., 58, 54.

4. For Līlā or Durgā as his third Śakti, cf: Parāśara Samh., Chs. VIII and X.

5. Schrader, F.O., Introd. to Ahir. Samh., p. 54.

Viṣṇu and the Earth, although in a completely different form, viz. that of the Varāha Avatāra or the 'boar incarnation' of Viṣṇu. In this form, Viṣṇu lifted the earth up from the bottom of the water. There are many examples of this motif, both textual and archeological. According to Gonda, "Visnu's relations with the earth are, indeed, a very important element in the avatāra conception which in its classical form may be regarded as a more exalted development of the god's helpful and loving interest" in earth and its inhabitants.¹

The Varāha form was chosen, says the Vāyu Purāṇa² because the boar is an animal which delights in sporting in the water. The Mahābhārata³ also implies this as it says

'... when all the surface of the Earth was flooded with water then the Lord, as he wandered about in this entire sea and in this air, like a firefly in the night in the rainy season, sought everywhere (for a place) to fix the Earth upon, and when he saw the Earth under water and secretly wished to save it (he said to himself), 'What shape, shall I assume to save the Earth from the waters?' As he thus

1. Gonda, J., AEV., p. 125 ff.

2. Vā.P., XXIII, 103-7; XLVIII, 40; XLIX, 11.

3. Mbh., III, 172, 49 ff, jalakrīḍābhirucitaṁ varāhaṁ rūpaṁ smarati (53).

turned the matter over in his mind and saw with his divine eyes he thought of the shape of a boar, an animal which loves to play in the water, and when he had given himself a boar's body that could speak and which agreed to the traditions of the Vedas, ten yojanas broad and a hundred yojanas long, resembling a great mountain in shape, shining with sharp tusks, thundering like a mass of clouds, and resembling a dark cloud, then the Lord descended like an offering boar into the water, drew the Earth up with one of his tusks and set it back in its place.¹

In the Visnu purāṇa² this myth is described as a type of Vedic ritual. The elevation of the earth from beneath the ocean in this form was, therefore, probably at first an allegorical representation of the extrication of the world, by the rites of religion, from a deluge of iniquity.³

Historical evidence shows that the association of the Earth and the boar goes back to the pre-historic past. For a long time, in many places, especially in northern and central Europe, people have regarded the

1. Mbh., III, 83, 21; 310, 28, etc.

2. Vis.P., I, 4, 9, vedaya jñamayaṁ rūpam. In this context, we may refer to a passage of considerable importance which relates that once the sacrifice went away in the form of Viṣṇu and entered the earth. (Taitt. Samh., VI, 2, 4, 2 f.).

3. Wilson, H., Vis.P., p.28.

boar as a symbol of storm, thunder-clouds, cyclones, etc., and the tusks are identified with lightning;¹ as the clouds fecundate the Earth, the two seem to have stood in some sort of marital relationship. In ancient Germany, boars were closely connected with the goddess of the clouds whose task was to fecundate the Earth. In Celtic religion, they are connected with the spirits of the Earth.² In many places, the animal embodiment of the corn spirit is the pig.³

These points, along with certain other instances like the boar sacrifice performed at harvest time,⁴ make it apparent that the boar symbolised fertility in many places. Even in a later period, Johanson observes

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1. Gonda, J., AEV., p.129. In Indian literature also, the roaring of the boar is compared to the sound of thundering clouds. Cf: Mbh., III, 272, 54-55.
 2. Gonda, J., AEV., p.130.
 3. Frazer, J., G B., p.604. Even otherwise, the pigs got some recognition as an animal of some importance as people used to take oath on their heads. This has found further elaboration in some numismatic reproductions.
 4. The Timorese sacrifice a black pig to the Earth-goddess for rain (GB., p.95). In Egypt, once a year, pigs are sacrificed to the moon and Osiris (who fecundates the earth) cf: GB., p.120. A Maurya pig head from Bhitā with red paint sprinkled on it (thus possibly denoting blood and suggesting that it was sacrificed) has been discovered. (ASI., 1911-12, pl.xxii, fig. 13).

that the penetration of Viṣṇu within the Earth is "an instance of the periodic self-immolation of the fertility god. As far as the correlate concept is concerned, to wit the god's return to the earth from which he has arisen, and the revival of nature resultant upon it, this may have combined with the 'boar concept' proper."¹

Possibly because of its habit of rooting up the soil, the boar became associated with the Earth goddess. But more relevant seems to be the tradition recorded by Grimm² that the boar, by rooting up the soil, taught the art of ploughing to men. That this was an acknowledged act in India is evident from the name bhū-dāra being used as a name for the pig.³ In certain parts of the world, the pigs were sometimes exempted from being sacrificed as they are useful for a good harvest. According to the Greek astronomer and mathematician Eudoxus, who lived for fourteen months in Egypt and conversed with the priests, the Egyptians

1. Gonda, J., AEV., p.140, n. In consequence of this avatāra, any boar rising from the water with earth on his head is to be worshipped as Viṣṇu. Mbh., xiii, 126, 3f.

2. For ref: cf: Gonda, J., AEV., p.133. In Sanskrit, the word potra, the snout of a hog is also used for ploughshare. Cf: (A V., II, 27, 2) 'the hog dug thee with his snout.'

3. Williams, M.M., SED., p.761(a).

spared the pig, not out of abhorrence, but from a regard for its utility in agriculture, because when the Nile had subsided, herds of swine were turned loose over the agricultural fields to tread the seed down into the moist earth.¹

Even in the Atharva Veda, we come across a verse that refers to an association between the earth and the boar. It is a verse from the Prthivī Sūkta:

"The earth holds the fool and holds the wise, endures that good and bad dwell (upon her); she keeps company with the boar, gives herself up to the wild hog."²

(malvam bibhretī gūrubhrdbhadrapānasya nidhanamtitiksuh |
varāhena prthivī samvidānā sūkarāya vi jihīte mrgāya).

Of course, this connotation cannot be taken to be solely responsible for the Varāha concept, but at the same time, it cannot be denied that it has at least some bearing in this respect.

Basham thinks that this Varāha avatara was probably developed through a primitive non-Aryan cult of a sacred pig.³ Its germ can definitely be traced back through the Brāhmanas to the transformation of a myth

1. Frazer, J., Golden Bough, p.623.

2. S B E., XLII, p.205. AV, xii, 1, 48

3. Basham, A.L., The wonder that was India, p.302.

in the Rgveda itself.¹ There Viṣṇu is said to have carried off a hundred buffaloes and a brew of milk that has some connection with the boar (called Emuṣā) who was slain by Indra, who shot him from the other side of the mountain.²

In the Taittirīya Samhitā,³ a very similar story occurs, but there the boar is said to protect the treasures of the Asuras concealed on the other side of the seven hills; Indra with a bunch of kusā grass pierced the hills and slew the boar. Viṣṇu (the sacrifice) carried off the boar and the gods won the wealth of the Asuras.⁴ The subsequent passages relate

1. RV., 1,61,7; VIII,77,10.

2. According to most scholars, this is merely a version of the slaying of Vṛtra (the famous deed of Indra) and the mountain must be the mountain of clouds. In the constellatory figures of the Rgvedic pantheon, there is a picture of Indra (Centaurus) who with his thunderbolt is piercing the heart of a prostrate Lupus (Varāha = boar). Cf: A.K.Devi, A Bibliographic Dict. of the Puranic personages, fig.7.

3. Taitt.Samh., VI,2,4,2 f.

4. The odana or "the valuable goods of the asuras" (asurāṇāṃ vasu vāmam, Maitr.Samh., III,8,3) "embodies the idea of life sustaining food, nourishment of longevity, primary substance essential to life" (Gonda, J., AEV., p.138) and thus, no doubt, signifies the earth, in which again the concept of Srī is inherent. In the Atharva Veda (XII,3,4) an odana is called amṛta and thus could have some association with the Amṛta-manthana legend!

that the gods won the Earth, which had belonged to the asuras at first.¹

But in the Satapatha Brāhmana² it was the boar Emuṣā itself that lifted the Earth from the waters. It is further added there that he was her lord Prajāpati. A passage in the Taittirīya Saṁhitā³ says that in the beginning the universe was water. Prajāpati, while floating on it, being the wind, saw the earth under it; assuming the form of a boar, he raised it; becoming Viśvakarman, he wiped (the water from it) or (he) rubbed it. It extended and became the extended one (Prthivī). The Taittirīya Brāhmana⁴ also reflects the same idea when it says that Prajāpati, in the form of a boar, rescued the Earth from the nether world.

The character of Brahmā as progenitor of mankind, the supreme creator, may have been responsible for such an identification of Prajāpati with the boar, the rescue of the earth from the bottom of the water being analogous to the creation of a new earth. After being raised by

1. This reminds one of the Mahābhārata episode where Lakṣmī is said to have forsaken the Asuras in favour of Viṣṇu. Mbh., XII, 228, 26 ff.

2. Ś.Br., XIV, 1,2, 11.

3. Taitt.Samh., VII, 1,5,1.

4. Taitt.Br., I, 1,3,5 ff.

the boar, being in contact with him, the earth expanded; that is, as Gonda says, "She becomes the abode for mankind and the producer of food. Thus the 'idea' of 'broadness' was once again realised."¹

But in the course of time, the boar that takes pity on the Earth becomes identified with Viṣṇu, as happened with the Matsya and Kūrma Avatāras, which were originally associated with Brahmā Prajāpati, but (with the development of the Bhāgavata [Vaiṣṇava] creed) were transferred to this composite cult god.² Viṣṇu

1. Gonda, J., AEV., p.139.

2. The fish, which according to the Ś.Br., (I,8,1,1) saved Manu from flood and is identified with Prajāpati, becomes an avatāra of Viṣṇu in the Purāṇas. In the same way, while Prajāpati in the same Br. (vii,5,1,5) moves about in the water in the form of a tortoise about to create offspring, the Purāṇas turn the tortoise into an incarnation of Viṣṇu, devised in order to recover objects that are lost in the deluge (cf: Keith, A.B., Rel. & Phil., pp. 112-113).

thus became the rescuer as well as the creator of the new Earth.¹

The stories differ in various versions. One story in the Mahābhārata² relates that the population on Earth once increased to an immense extent, and the Earth, unable to bear the pressure, sank down; so Viṣṇu took the form of a boar and lifted the earth up from the nether regions.

In the Harivamśa,³ it is stated that the mountains that came into existence on the newly arisen surface of the Earth, were the tejas of Viṣṇu. Being unable to bear them, the Earth sank down. Thereafter, the god, having assumed the shape of a mountain 'the Varāha parvata' killed the demon Hiraṇyākṣa and rescued the Earth. But according to another part of the same book,⁴ Viṣṇu created the same mountain after his own form.

According to the Mahābhārata,⁵ Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa, having

1. Cf: AEV, p.139ff.

2. Mbh., III, 142.

3. Hariv. III, 39; Langlois, A.M., Hariv., II, 129, 366 ff.

4. Ib., III, -34; cf: Gonda, J., AEV., pp. 73-74.

5. Mbh., xii, 209. In the Mokṣa Dharma Ch., Viṣṇu destroys the demons in the form of a varāha, but no particular individual is specified, nor does the elevation of the Earth depend on their discomfiture.

assumed the form of a boar, roaring and thundering, penetrated into the nether regions and crushed down the daityas and the dānayas and the asuras, who were jealous of the gods and had tortured the Earth with such a heavy load that she nearly perished. "This version of the story," says Gonda, "approaches the classical form of the Varāha Avatāra."¹ Later Hiranyākṣa appears as the central figure and his defeat at the hand of Viṣṇu became the most accepted theme in literature² as well as in most of the monumental reproductions where the Varāha form is shown as trampling on the head of a dānava while rescuing the Earth.³

The Eran inscription of the time of Toramāna, engraved on the chest of a colossal red sandstone boar image, refers to Viṣṇu, who in the act of lifting up the Earth, caused the mountains to tremble with the blows of his hard snout.⁴ In the concluding sloka of the Mudrārāksasa, the King is compared to Viṣṇu who by

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1. Gonda, J., AEV., p.141. Cf: Bhg.Pur. (III,13,18) where Varāha came out of Brahmā's nose as little as a finger and then grew into a huge shape.
 2. Hariv., iii,39; Mat.P., CLXIII; Śiva P., Jñāna Samh., LIX, 21-29.
 3. Classical Age, pl. XXIV, fig.55.
 4. CII., III, pp.159-60. Om jayati dharanyuddhārane ghana ghora āghāta ghūrnnita mahādhara devo varāha mūrtis trailokya ... etc., etc.

assuming the form of a boar rescued the Earth oppressed by the Mlecchas.

But all the stories narrated above agree at one point, that is, Viṣṇu rescued as well as created the new Earth.¹ Sooner or later, the rescuer took the position of the husband and Bhū became one of Viṣṇu's favourite consorts. Thus, in the Viṣṇu purāṇa² in her address to the lord, the Earth said 'I am of thee, upheld by thee; thou art my creator, and to thee I fly for refuge; hence in this universe, Mādhavī (the bride of Mādhava, i.e. Viṣṇu) is my designation.' Gonda has thus rightly concluded that this boar is apparently the husband of the Earth, that is, the one

1. Cf: Siva P. IV, 9, which illustrates a different reason as it states 'Ṛṣti pravṛtti kāmō vai katham jñānam prajāyate / varāṇam kāṇaṇam rūpam kalpārthe ca prakalpitaṃ //.'

2. Viṣ.P., I, 4, 20; cf: In the Rām., ^{VII} (97, 13-16), Prthivī is three times addressed by Sītā as Mādhavī 'mādhavī devī vivaraṃ dātumarhati'. Bhāṣ.P. (III, 13, 37-42) says that the elephants, when they come out of the water with the lotus on their tusks, Prthivī looks like that being on your tusks. You are the father of this world and this is the mother, your wife. Another possible reason for this relationship is implied in a Mahābhārata passage (V, 117, 14) where the Earth is stated to be married to Bhūmipati, the lord of the Earth. Although it may simply imply a king - who is believed to be mystically united with the Earth, a possible identification with Viṣṇu (Viṣṇu's portion being incarnated on earth as the king, Mbh. (Poona Ed.), XII, 59, 135) cannot be altogether ruled out.

who fecundates her,¹ and it is natural that in the Brahmanic pantheon, the animal was identified with the favourite creator god, who in the later period was replaced by Viṣṇu.²

The Mahābhārata³ even relates that the Earth sprang from Viṣṇu himself. At another place, Viṣṇu is said to have created the Earth with all things upon her.⁴ Even one of his most popular names, 'Govinda', which literally means 'he who finds or wins cows', seems to allude to Viṣṇu's recovering the 'cow', i.e. the Earth, when it was lost in the waters.⁵

Some of the elements that strengthened this relation are inherent in certain details of the Epic. Nāraka, the divine power or being, is said to be the son of Bhūmi and a god in the form of a boar.

1. The significance of the single tusk (ekaśrṅga, mahāśrṅga, Mbh., XIII, 149, 70) would be in perfect harmony with the generative function of the boar. Earth is, without her means of productivity, alingā, till Viṣṇu supplies the deficiency and makes her fruitful. (Hopkins, E., Ep. Myth., pp. 80-81).
2. Gonda, J., AEV., p. 139.
3. Mbh., III, 200, 127 (bhūrvaishnavī); Cf: Viṣ.P., I, 13, 91 where the earth is produced from the sole of Viṣṇu (prthivī viṣṇu pādatalodbhavā).
4. Ib., XII, 207, 30.
5. Ib., XII, 207, 27.

(Kāmarūpa kings tracing their descent from Narakāśura also refer to this story in their inscriptions.)

As Naraka or Bhauma (born of Bhūmi) is a representative of dung,¹ "the demon of filth or manure" "the god of the filth of the farmyard",² and as filth or manure is the favourite home of hogs and their relatives, and as it is the product of the Earth and the rooting activities of these animals, this relationship does not seem to be very far-fetched. In fact, the story of the procreation of Naraka is well-known and widely distributed.³

But while most of the passages dealing with Naraka do not mention his father, the southern recension of the Mahābhārata⁴ declares him to be Nārāyaṇa, a fact which is unknown to the other parts of the Epic.⁵

The legend of Naraka is dealt with in greater detail in the Viṣṇu purāṇa⁵ which refers to an open combat between Viṣṇu and Naraka, and to the latter's defeat

1. Meyer, J., Trilogie ..., II, p.47.

2. Gonda, J., AEV., p.140.

3. Ib., p.141.

4. Hopkins, E., Ep.Myth., p.51; Cf: Mbh., Kumbh. rec. , VII, 29,27 ff.

5. Viṣ.P., V, 29,23; Cf: Langlois, Hariv., I, Ch.121, p.525.

and death. After the battle, the goddess Bhūmi approached Viṣṇu and said "When, O Lord, I was upheld by thee in the form of a boar, thy contact then engendered this my son ... Verily it is for the sanctification of thy son that he has been killed by thee."¹ In the Kālikā Upapurāṇa, Nāraka is said to be the son of the Earth and the Varāha Avatāra, but found and adopted by Janaka.² This may be considered one of the various intimations of hostilities between the followers of Viṣṇu and Śiva that occurred in the Puranic literature, as Nāraka was blessed by Śiva.³

This passionate love of Viṣṇu for the Earth is well attested. Even in the old Javanese 'Bhōmakāvya' the violation of the Earth by Viṣṇu is mentioned, and there are many different versions of the myth of the disappearance of the Earth and her rescue by Viṣṇu.⁴

The solar character of Viṣṇu also played quite a determining role in this respect. The importance of

1. Wilson, H., Vis.P., p.582; Cf: Bhg.P., X,59,30. But in the Mbh. (App. I), III, 142,37, it is said that Viṣṇu slew Nāraka, son of Diti.

2. He is said to be born at the same spot where Sītā had made her appearance from the furrow, Kālikā P., xxx-xxxi;xxxvii-xli.

3. Wilson, H., Vis.P., p. 583.

4. For ref., cf: Gonda, J., AEV., p.143.

the Sun, as the initiator of earthly life, as the great generative power in the universe, as the mighty power that fertilises the earth,¹ seems to have contributed a good deal in this conjugal union.

Thus the Earth, whose worship seems to have antedated the later Lakṣmī concept, gradually merged into her as an independent deity. The consort of Viṣṇu was equated with the Earth, as we find them being represented on the either side of Viṣṇu, in which aspect he retains some traces of his solar conception, where Sṛī and Bhū personify two important aspects of prosperity and productivity.²

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1. Occasionally the sun is earth's husband and as in Timor, his union with her is the source of fertility, GB., ii, p.99, f.n.1. . In the Meti islands which lie between the western end of New Guinea and the northern part of Australia, the sun is supposed to come down to the holy fig tree to fertilise the earth and their mystic union is dramatically celebrated with music and dance when dogs and pigs are sacrificed (cf: ERE., V,131; GB., pp. 179-80). Amongst the Khonds, Teri Pennu (the Earth goddess) is the spouse of the Sun god (ERE., V,131). In Bengal, the Oraons worship the Earth as a goddess and annually celebrate her marriage with the Sun god when the Sāl tree is in blossom. GB., 190-01.
 2. It may be noted in this respect that in the Taitt.Br., (III, 1,2,6) another goddess is said to be Viṣṇu's wife (māhīm devīm viṣṇupaṭnīm). Although Māhī has usually been regarded in the Rigveda as a qualifying epithet, considering the Earth to be the only surviving example, can it be taken to denote the Earth?

ADITI

Another Rgvedic divinity who seems to resemble Śrī-Lakṣmī is Aditi. Though not the subject of any separate hymn, Aditi is an object of frequent celebration in the Rgveda where she is supplicated for blessings on children and cattle, for protection and forgiveness. Originally an abstract Vedic deity, she has often been compared with boundless space; sometimes she is a purely abstract personification of immensity or infinity, sometimes the mythological personification of the female principle in creation, known as the mother of the world or mother of the gods.¹

In fact, motherhood is her essential characteristic; she is the mother par-excellence.² She is the mother³ (once the sister)⁴ of the Ādityas, mother of Mitra and Varuṇa,⁵ mother or daughter of Dakṣa,⁶ sometimes of other gods, of

1. Leach, Maria, S.D.F.M.L., p. 10. Cf: Yāska, Nirukta, IV, 22.

2. Jaim. Up. Brh., I, 41, 4ff.

3. AV. IX, 1, 4.

4. R V., VIII, 101, 15.

5. Macdonell, A.A., Vedic Mythology, p. 121.

6. RV., X, 72, 4-5, 'Dakṣa is born from Aditi, Aditi from Dakṣa'.

kings and of sons in general.¹

This idea of mother-hood is in complete harmony with her conception as a cow² where the terrestrial milk that is mixed with the Soma is said to be hers; sometimes the Soma itself is like her milk.

Aditi seems to be a personification of the golden (the usual colour of the goddess of abundance) honeywhip (i.e. the lightening that causes the rain) of the Āsvins as well; this honeywhip has been described as the daughter of the Vasus, mother of the Ādityas, (mātādityānām duhitā vasunām) and is said to milk out refreshment from its two inexhaustible thousand-streaming breasts,⁴ (thereby referring to Aditi). Thus Coomaraswamy says that this identification ^{of} Lakṣmī and Aditi is suggested by the early images of mother Śrī pressing from her breasts a stream of milk.⁵

1. RV, II, 27, 7; Cf: III, 4, 11; VIII, 56, 11; AV., III, 82; XI, 1, 11 in which Aditi is regarded as 'mother of excellent sons', 'mother of powerful sons', 'mother of divine heroes'.
2. RV., VIII, 101, 15. Cf: Ib., 1, 153, 3; IX, 96, 15; X, 11, 1. Hathor, an important mother goddess of Egypt, was revered in the form of a cow (James, E.O., CMG, p. 59) and Isis, as the goddess of procreation and birth had the cow as her emblem (ERE, i, p. 508).
3. Cf: RV., X, 91, 5, 'Thy śriyah are like the lightning-flashes of the rain-clouds'.
4. Macdonell, Ved. Myth., p. 151; Cf: Earth as a milch cow, AV., XII, 1, 45, 65.
5. Coomaraswamy, E.A., Vol. I, p. 177.

In another place, the honey-whip is compared to a cow (like Aditi) and the nourishing waters are likened to bulls poured upon her, while she in turn 'pours nourishment at will for him who knows this'.¹ This seems to be a definite parallel to the Abhiṣeka composition of Lakṣmī, elephants performing the lustre over her while she presses streams of milk from her own breasts,² as the early Stūpas represent her.³

The Rgveda refers to Aditi as a personification of universal nature.⁴ In the Atharva Veda, Aditi is said to be the place of production.⁵ All these references bring her to the same status as that of Śrī-Lakṣmī, and Bhū or Pṛthivī.

1. A.V., IX, 1, 8-9; cf: Taitt. Samh., III, 2, 11, 3, where the lightning is said to low like a cow and tends its young like a mother, when the rains are let fall. In this context, we may note how the flashes of lightning, called maidens, are usually feminine compared to the male clouds, and 'dark cloud' is often an epithet of Viṣṇu. So the identification of the honeywhip with Aditi and Lakṣmī is further supported. In a later period, Rādhā has often been compared to a flash of lightning and Kṛṣṇa to a dark cloud and it is interesting to recognise such late survivals of ancient modes of thought and their re-interpretation in later mythology. E.A., Vol. I, p. 176ff, f.n. 4.

2. Supra, p. 53.

3. Barua, B.M., Bharhut, fig. 80; infra pp. 162, 165.

4. RV., I, 89, 10; cf; J.Up.Br., I, 41, 4ff.

5. AV., VI, 120, 2.

It is not only as Nature personified or as a great Mother Goddess, or as a goddess of Abundance that Aditi bears analogies with Śrī Lakṣmī, but also as the consort of Viṣṇu. In the Yajurveda, Aditi is referred to as receiving an oblation as the wife of Viṣṇu, (adityai Viṣṇupatnyai).¹ In another passage of the same text, she is described as viṣṭhambho divo dharuṇaḥ prthivyāḥ asyeśanā jagato viṣṇupatnī viśvā vyācāḥ iṣayanti subhūtiḥ śivā no asti aditir ūpasthe,² i.e. "Supporter of the Sky, sustainer of this earth, sovereign of this world, wife of Viṣṇu, may the all-embracing powerful Aditi, filling us with vigour, be auspicious to us (abiding) in her lap".³

In this context, we can refer to the texts where Aditi is the wife of Kāśyapa 'the tortoise', who is mentioned as the creator.⁴ In the Sātapatha Brāhmaṇa, Prajāpati created living beings assuming the form of a tortoise (Kūrma)⁵ and later this form of the creator god survives in Viṣṇu's Kūrma-Avatāra.

1. Taitt. Samh., VII, 5, 14; Vāj. Samh., XXIX, 60.

2. Taitt. Samh., IV, 4, 12.

3. Muir, J., OST., V, p. 23.

4. AV., VIII, 5, 14.

5. ŚBr., VII, 5, 1, 5.

Sometimes, Aditi is declared to be the same as Pr̥thivī,¹ as in the case of Śrī-Lakṣmī. In the Nighantū or ancient vocabulary prefixed to the Nirukta, the word Aditi is given the synonyms, (1) Pr̥thivī, (2) Vāk, (3) Go and (4) in the dual Dyāvāpr̥thivī.² Pr̥thivī is called broadly expanding Aditi.³ Sāyana consistently visualises her as the mother of gods or Bhūmi, i.e. Earth.⁴ Again with regard to the Earth, the Vedic poet seems to discern in Aditi 'a sort of common womb, a substratum of all existences'.⁵ Aditi is also called 'Mahīm! 'Uruvyacati'.⁶ Her identity with Bhūdevi is evident even from a later passage of the Harivaṃśa where the same goddess is declared to be Aditi to the gods, Earth to the living beings and Sītā (who was later regarded as an incarnation of Śrī Lakṣmī) to the ploughman.⁷

1. RV., I, 72, 9, AV., XII, 1, 61; XIII, 1, 38; ŚBr., V, 3, 1, 4; VII, 4, 2, 7. Paraskara Grhya Sūtra, 1, 3, 26.

2. Nighantū, I, 1, 11; 2, 11; 3, 30, Cf: Keith, A.B., Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas, p. 216.

3. AV., XII, 1, 61.

4. RV., 1, 89, 3; 113, 19; V, 46, 6; VII, 88, 7; IX, 71, 5; 74, 3-5; 132, 6.

5. Barth, A., The Religions of India, p. 19.

6. Muir, John, OST., V, p. 36.

7. Hariv., II, 3, 12 ff.

In the light of all the evidence, it may be said that although Aditi resembles Śrī-Lakṣmī to a great extent and in later mythology, like Śrī, is a daughter of Dakṣa,¹ she is not exactly the same as Śrī but is rather the prototype of another of Viṣṇu's consorts, Bhūmi. But something of her is definitely present in the later Śrī Lakṣmī concept, says Coomaraswamy, whether as an independent power or as a consort of Viṣṇu.²

1. Viṣ.P.,iv,1,6; Bhg.P.,ix,1,10.

2. Coomaraswamy, A.K., E.A., Vol. I, 1929, p.177,

SĪNĪVĀLĪ, RĀKĀ, KUHŪ, etc.

At the same time, it must be observed that there are certain other divinities as well who seem to have anticipated the Śrī-Lakṣmī of later texts, if certain characteristics can be taken as important enough to justify this hypothesis. These divinities are Sīnīvālī, Rākā, Kuhū, Anumati, Purāṇḍhi, Puṣṭi and others.

Of these, Sīnīvālī seems the most important, as she has also been characterised as Viṣṇu's wife.¹ Her iconographic details also coincide with Śrī Lakṣmī's figurative description. Sīnīvālī is said to be broad-hipped (prthustukāh),² fair-armed (subāhū), fair-fingered (svaṅgurī) and prolific (bahūsūvarī)³ and, according to J.N. Banerjea,⁴ when Lakṣmī is said to be like Nyāgrodha parimaṇḍala she has the basic features underlying the above-mentioned details. But at the same time, it should be borne in mind that in India, these are the features of ideal womanhood and motherhood, and thus all the mother-goddess icons follow these details in their execution.

1. AV., VII, 46, 3.

2. Taitt. Samh., III, 1, 11, 3.

3. Cf: Taitt. Samh., IV, 1, 5, 3; Kāthaka Samhitā, XVI, 5; Maitr. Samh., II, 7, 5; Vaj. Samh., XI, 56; SBr., VI, 5, 1, 10.

4. Banerjea, J.N., DHĪ., p. 373.

As Lakṣmī is the goddess of Fertility, so we see how Sīnīvālī is invoked for progeny in the R̥veda, (prajām dehi didiḍḍhinah)¹ and is asked to bestow pregnancy (garbham dehi sīnīvālī);² this verse is also used in the Gr̥hya Sūtras to accompany rites connected with conception.³

During the Epic Age, Lakṣmī and Sīnīvālī were amongst the various designations of Devasenā⁴ (the wife of Skanda-Kārttikeya), a reflection of the fact that even at a later period. Lakṣmī and Sīnīvālī were equated.

Another prototypical divinity is Rākā.⁵ She is mentioned in the R̥veda as a rich and bountiful goddess,⁶ reminiscent of Lakṣmī, Rākā is also connected with parturition as she is called upon to 'sew the work' (apparently the embryo) with an unfailing needle and to bestow a son and abundant wealth.⁷

1. RV., II, 32, 6-7.

2. Ib., X, 184, 2; AV., V, 25, 3; Cf: AV., XIV, 2, 15, 21.

3. Hiranya Gr̥hya Sūtra, I, 25, 1; Cf: Atri Samhitā, LVI, 16; Kaśyapa Samh., IX, 58.

4. Mbh., III, 229, 49.

5. The name may be derived from the root 'rā' 'to give'.

6. RV., V, 42, 12.

7. Ib., II, 32, 4.

Kuhū seems to be another divinity of this class as she is also propitiated along with the goddesses mentioned above, to bestow wealth. A goddess called Guṅgu is mentioned only once in the Rgveda,¹ Sāyana identifies her with Kuhū. With them can be included Anumati, the 'favour' (of the gods).²

A personification of the phases of the moon is seen in these four names; Sīnīvālī, the day before the new moon,³ Kuhū, the new moon day;⁴ Anumati, the day before full-moon⁵ and Rākā, the day of full moon.⁶

The Epic also identifies these goddesses with four moon phases.⁷ In the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, they are mentioned as the four daughters of Aṅgīrasa and Smṛti.⁸ The Matsya gives a detailed description of these four moon phases⁹ and

1. RV., II, 32, 8.

2. Ib., X, 59, 6; 167, 3.
RV., X, 59, 6; 167, 3; Ved. Myth., p. 119.

3. RV., II, 32, 6; AV., II, 26, 2; VI, 11, 3; Taitt Samh., 1, 8, 8, 1; III, 4, 9, 1; Vaj Samh., XI 55, 56; XXXIV, 10; Kāth. Samh., XII, 8; Sadvimśa Br., V, 6.

4. AV., VII, 47, 1-2; Taitt Samh., 1, 8, 8, 1; III, 4, 9, 1; Kāth Samh., XII, 8 etc.

5. Taitt Samh., 1, 8, 8, 1; III, 4, 9, 1; Kāth Samh., XII, 8; Vaj. Samh., XXIX, 60; XXXIV, 8, 9, Sadvimśa Br., V, 6.

6. RV., II, 32, 4; V, 42, 12; Taitt. Samh., 1, 8, 8, 1; III, 4, 9, 1; Cf; Nirukta, XI, 31; See also RV., V, 12, 12.

7. Mbh., VIII, 34, 32.

8. Mārka. P., LII, 20; See also Mbh., III, 218, 588.

9. Mat. P., CXLI, 38-53.

it is interesting to note that in the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa, Śrī is a kalā of the moon.¹ The Matsya Purāṇa (which gives a detailed account of these four moon phases) states how, after attending the Rājasūya sacrifice, Lakṣmī, Sīnīvālī, Kūhū and six other goddesses, left their respective husbands, being attracted by the splendour of the Moon.² But the Kāśīkhaṇḍa, possibly to gloss over their blemishes, merely refers to these nine divinities as lunar goddesses who attended Soma, the Moon.³ Thus Śrī-Lakṣmī, even as a lunar goddess, is grouped with them.

PURAMDHI

Another divinity who resembles Lakṣmī, is Puramdhi,⁴ identified with Parendi in the Avestā, the goddess of plentitude and abundance⁵ and 'genie de la fécondité'.⁶

1. Brahmāṇḍa, XXXV, 92.

2. Mat. P., XXIII, 23ff.

3. Kāśī Khaṇḍa, XIV, 33.

4. RV., 1, 116, 13.

5. Yasht, VIII, 38.

6. Renom, Louis, L'Inde Classique, Vol. 1, p. 328.

PUSṬI

Puṣṭi may be referred to in this connection, for her very name suggests some resemblance to Lakṣmī and Sāyana has rightly equated her with Lakṣmī as the goddess of prosperity, 'sudrśīva puṣṭih śobhanadarśanā lakṣmīriva bhavati'.¹ This Puṣṭi may have merged later into the Puṣṭi-Sarasvatī figure,² who occupies a place beside Viṣṇu as his co-wife.³

Other Vedic names such as Dhiṣaṇā, Sunṛtā, Ilā etc. may be cited as they remind us of some of the Lakṣmī characteristics. But they betray only a part of the whole concept of the goddess and no one of these goddesses, not even Pṛthivī (although she played an important role in the origin and evolution of the goddess concept of Śrī Lakṣmī) can be said to be qualified to serve as the sole prototype of Śrī-Lakṣmī.

1. Commentary on the Rgveda, IV, 16, 15.

2. It is interesting to note here how Sarasvatī, who like any other divinity has been implored to bestow Śrī and progeny in the Rgveda (I, 188, 8; X, 184, 2), took away puṣṭi from Śrī in the Brahmenic story of the emergence of Śrī from the head of Brahmā. (ŚBr., XI, 4, 3, 3).

3. In this context we may refer to the Pañcarātra Samhitās which mention the two principal energies of Viṣṇu, the Bhoktr Śakti and the Kartr Śakti; the former is known as Lakṣmī and the latter as Puṣṭi (tasya śakti dvayam tādṛ-guṁśram bhinnalakṣaṇam 1 bhoktr Śakti smṛta lakṣmih puṣṭirvai Kartrṣamjñitā 11. Sātvata Samhita, XIII, 49).

C H A P T E R I V .

ŚRĪ-LAKṢMĪ'S ASSOCIATION WITH VIṢṆU
AND VARIOUS OTHER GODS

VISNU AND ŚRĪ-LAKṢMĪ

One of the most striking elements in the history of the iconography of the Gupta period is the appearance of Śrī-Lakṣmī beside Viṣṇu as his beloved consort. The most revealing amongst these representations of Lakṣmī's devout adoration to Viṣṇu as a submissive wife is possibly the Deogarh panel which depicts her as massaging Viṣṇu's feet.¹ This finds an elaborate description in Kālidāsa's Raghuvamśa.² Besides, we can mention a number of epigraphic records which for the first time refer to Śrī-Lakṣmī's union with Viṣṇu, viz. the Junāgarh inscription of Skanda Gupta which describes Viṣṇu as the perpetual resort of Lakṣmī.³ To this may be added the Sarnāth inscription of Prakāṣāditya,⁴ the Andhavaram Plates of the Māthara king Anantakāśīvarman,⁵ certain Valabhī grants,⁶ etc. Even the inscription of the time of a non-Indian ruler Mihirakula did not refrain from dedicating some verses to this

1. Banerjea, J.N., DHI., Pl. XXII, 2.

2. Kālidāsa, Raghuvamśa, x, 8.

3. Fleet, J., CII, iii, p. 58, no. 14, line 1, kamalānilaya nayaḥ lakṣmyāḥ vviṣṇu atyanta jīṣṇuḥ.

4. Ib. p. 285, no. 79, line 4, lakṣmīriva vāsudevasya.

5. Ep. Ind. xxviii, No. 31.

6. I.A., ix, 1880, p. 238, lines 13-14; x, 1881, p. 284, lines, 10-11 etc.

divine couple.¹ Some Gupta seals from Bhiṭā, although not represent¹ them in an explicit manner, imply their growing association by depicting Lakṣmī for the first time in association with Garuḍa and the śaṅkha,² the two most commonly found emblems of Viṣṇu.

According to H.C. Raychaudhuri, this was in conformity with the important position that the royal consorts were attaining then: "It indicates the assertion of the rights of women".³ But there is hardly any evidence that royal consorts achieved any political rights during that period. It is true that on the obverse of the Candra Gupta-Kumāradevī coins, the queen has been portrayed beside the King,⁴ but this was more likely in order to establish Samudra Gupta's own Licchavi relationship than to testify to the powers of the queen. Moreover, the texts of that period describing Śrī Lakṣmī as possessing only two hands when she is represented beside Viṣṇu⁵ also indicate her subordinate position.

Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu must have been united some time

1. Fleet, CII, iii, p. 164, No. 37, line 8.

2. Marshall, J., 'Seals from Basārh and Bhiṭā', ASIAR., 1911-12, pl. XIX, p. 24, No. 42.

3. H.C. Raychaudhuri, Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Sect, p. 177.

4. Allan, J., CGC, pl. III, 1-15.

5. Viṣṇu. Purāṇa, I, 41, 10f.

before these iconographic representations, but not before the later parts of the Mahābhārata. Lakṣmī had an unimportant place in early Vaiṣṇavism. In the Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra, she is just one amongst the various goddesses of the Vaiṣṇava pantheon, the other three being Sarasvatī, Tuṣṭi and Puṣṭi.¹ In the Bhagavad Gītā, Śrī is mentioned as a manifestation of Viṣṇu,² but this does not carry much significance as in that chapter, Viṣṇu has been compared to the best of all things, and Śrī is considered merely as the embodiment of excellence rather than as true goddess.

In the Gāthā Saptaśatī of Hāla, the conjugal relationship of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī is emphasised in a verse which states that the jewel Kaustubha that adorns Viṣṇu's breast bears the reflection of Lakṣmī's face, compared to the shadow of the spotless moon cast over the sun during an eclipse.³ The authorship has been ascribed to Hāla, a Sātavāhana king. It can be surmised then that Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī were united sometime in the early centuries of the Christian era. But scholars differ with regard to the date of its compilation.⁴

1. Baudh. Dh. sūt., II, 5, 9, 10.

2. Bhg. gītā, X. 34.

3. Gāthā saptaśatī, 151.

4. A.B. Keith says, on the basis of the type of the Mahārāṣṭrī Prākṛt in which the text has been written, that it could

The association of Lakṣmī with the śaṅkha¹ (an emblem of Viṣṇu) may be regarded as an instance of their marital relationship, but this does not seem to have happened before the Gupta period. Similarly the appearance of the lotus as one of Viṣṇu's emblems may be connected with this union. But the lotus seems to be the last attribute to be associated with Viṣṇu, his earliest image with the lotus being of the late Kuṣāna period.² In this context we may refer to a Kuṣāna statuette depicting (Ardhanārīśvara) Śiva, Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī (in her Gajalakṣmī aspect) and Kubera together.³ This has been supposed to be a step towards the union of Lakṣmī with Viṣṇu.⁴ But this should rather be held as an attempt to reassure the importance of Brahmanism.

Footnote 4 contd. from previous page

not be earlier than 200 A.D. and has therefore dated it between 200 and 450 A.D. (History of Sanskrit Literature, p. 224). Mirashi says that it should not be taken for a chronological landmark as the text contains many interpolated verses and only 430 of the total stanzas are common to all the recensions. Mirashi, V.V., 'The date of the Gāthā Saptasāti', IHQ., XXIII, No. 3, Sept., 1947, pp. 308-09. Cf. also Winternitz, M., History of Indian Literature, Vol. III, pt. 1, pp. 114-15.

1. Viśdh. P., iii, 82, 8; Cf: also the Basārḥ and Bhiṭā seals.
2. Agrawala, V.S., CSIMM, p. 4f, No. 1168.
3. Ib., p. x-xi, No. O.241.
4. Jayaswal, S., Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism, p. 98.

The Nārāyaṇīya section of the Mahābhārata does not mention goddess Śrī Lakṣmī and only once, and quite casually, in the eulogy recited by Nārada is Viṣṇu called Śrīvāsa and Lakṣmyāvāsa as well as Kīrtiyāvāsa, Vidyāvāsa, Sarvāvāsa.¹

S. Jayaswal argues that this text (which has been ascribed to a date in the later Kuṣāna period from the evidence gathered so far and which G.A. Grierson places between the second and the fourth centuries A.D.)² was composed before the union of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī.³ But even if the emphasis is put on the abstract concept of śrī Lakṣmī, it is contestable why that should eliminate any possibility of Viṣṇu's connection with her. Thus it can rather be said that their union was just at its initial stage and was not yet very well established.

Several other Mahābhārata stories reveal the growing attachment of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī⁴ and it is only in the later sections of the great Epics, the Mahābhārata⁵ and the Rāmāyaṇa,⁶

1. Mbh., xii, 325, 125, 129, Poona ed.

2. Grierson, G.A., *The Nārāyaṇīya and the Bhāgavatas*, IA., Vol. XXXVII, 1908, p. 258

3. Jayaswal, S., *op. cit.*, p. 16.

4. Mbh., xii, 59, 131-34 which brings Śrī as Rājyaśrī closer to Viṣṇu as the King incarnate on earth. Cf: *Infra*, p.297f.

5. Mbh., xiii, 149. (Poona ed.).

6. Rām, ii, 118, 20; cf: Amarakoṣa, 1, 1, 27f.

that we find Śrī-Lakṣmī being explicitly depicted as the wife of Nārāyaṇa Viṣṇu and also of Kṛṣṇa,¹ the human avatāra of the god. Thus it may be contended that their conjugal relationship was well established about the beginning of the Gupta period.

This association of Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu was to a great extent the consequence of the religious development of this period influenced by a new philosophy whereby all the gods were given Śaktis. This philosophy was based on a very ancient doctrine, the doctrine of Sāṃkhya which professes the idea of Puruṣa and Prakṛti. According to this philosophy, Prakṛti is the primitive matter from which the universe is evolved.² In an almost similar manner the growing sentiment of the period also believed that creation is totally impossible unless god is united with a divine consort. Hence the idea of Śakti based on the idea of Prakṛti. With the emergence of the idea of a divine family she was converted into the subdued wife of Puruṣa symbolised by the image of Lakṣmī in her

1. Mbh., i, 61, 94, 199, 6; Śrīh kṛṣṇeneva saṃgataḥ; yathā nārāyaṇe lakṣmīstatha.

2. Cf: Gonda, J., Viṣṇuism & Śivaism, p. 56, "The coupling in pairs, self evident as it is when there is a question of creation", cannot be "disconnected from the Vedic maxim that a pair (dvandam) means strength and a productive copulation". Cf: dvandam vai vīryam dvandam vai mithunam prajānam, S.Br., I, 1, 1, 22 etc.

character as a devoted consort of Viṣṇu.

The philosophical aspect of the Śakti, which is not clearly reflected in the Epics and the Purāṇas, achieves strong emphasis in the Pañcarātra Saṁhitās. Thus, according to the Ahīrbudhnya Saṁhitā: Viṣṇu was in a state of nothingness with his Śakti absorbed within him, the śakti, which is an inseparable part of Viṣṇu (śaktayaḥ sarva bhāvanāmacintyā aprthaksthitāḥ),¹ as inseparable as the moon and the moonlight, the sun and its ray, the sea and the ripples,

sarvabhāvanūga śaktirjyotsneva himadīdhiteḥ 1

bhāvabhāvanūgā tasya sarvakāryakārī bibhoḥ 11²

sūryasya rāsmayo yadvad ūmayaścāmbu dheriva 1

sarvaiśvarya prabhāvena kamalā śrīpateḥ 11³

tato bhagavato viṣṇorbhāsā bhāsavaravigrahāt 1

lakṣmyādirniḥsṛtā dhyāyet sphuliṅga nicayā 11⁴

When Viṣṇu first felt the urge of creative impulse, but could not possibly sport with himself, he transmitted this desire to his only great energy, and with that, his Śakti, comprised

1. Ahīr. Saṁh., III, 2.

2. Ib., 5; cf: 6. LX, 3.

3. Jayākhyā Saṁh., VI, 78.

4. Ib., XIII, 105-6. The Lakṣmī Tantra (II, 16) describes it as a state of Supreme Brahman known as Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, lakṣmīnārāyaṇākhyātam brahma sanātanam.

of three gunas, was awakened.¹ 'When Śakti first awakes from her absorption in deep embrace into the vibration of activity', it acquired an independent character of its own.² In due course, this Śakti, i.e. Śrī, the very embodiment of Viṣṇu's energy, in whom both the material cause and the instrumental cause are deeply rooted, takes the position of the subdued consort of Viṣṇu. But like a wife, who does everything for her husband and yet retains her separate personality, so does Śrī Lakṣmī. Thus, in the Pañcarātric view, Śrī-Lakṣmī has spontaneously and by virtue of her own power, differentiated herself from god for the sake of the liberation of all souls.

This Śakti, which is a part of Viṣṇu himself, and created by him, what is his prākṛta guna, is known in the Purāṇas as Viṣṇu-Māyā. In the Kūrma Purāṇa, as Śrī emerges from the sea, Viṣṇu introduces her to others as, 'iyam sā paramā śaktrimanmayī brahmarūpinī l māyā mama priyānantā yayedam dhāryate jagat'.³

1. Cf: ekāki sā tadā naiva ramake sma sanātanah l
sa līlārthampunaścedamasṛjat puskarekṣanah ll
līlopakaranam devah prakṛtim trigunātmikām l
māyā samīnom purah sṛtvā tayā reme janārdanah ll
Purā kalpāvasāne tu bhagavaṇ puruṣottamah l
jagatsrastum manascakre līlārasasamutsukah ll, etc. etc.
Ahir. Samh., XXXVIII, 10-12, XL, 4.

2. Ahir. Samh., III, 9-10. The following verses describe the various names of Viṣṇu's Śakti, owing to her various nature: 'jagattaya lakṣmyamāha sa lakṣmiriti giyate l
śravanti vaiṣṇavam bhavam sā śrīriti nigadyate ll etc. etc.

3. Kūrma p., Pūrvabhāga, I, 34ff.

But, as has been stated before, this reinforcement of the idea of Puruṣa and Prakṛti in the coupling of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī was in no way an arbitrary incident. As in the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, the principle of Māyā (illusion) of Vedānta has been conceived as the wife of Puruṣa (Brahmā),¹ in a similar manner the Puruṣa and the Prakṛti have been identified with Śakti and Śiva of the Tantras. This firm Indian belief in Śaktivāda thus ventures to bring a popular synthesis among contrary philosophies where Śiva-Śakti of the Tantras, Puruṣa-Prakṛti of the Sāṃkhya, Brahman-Māyā of the Vedānta and Viṣṇu-Lakṣmī of the Vaiṣṇavism, are all related. So it is said, this new religious sentiment affected by philosophical speculation, was directed to a god of grace united with a divine partner, whether in philosophy as Śakti or Prakṛti or in religion as Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī or Umā.²

1. Brhadāraṇyaka Up., I, 4, 1-3.

2. Cf: in the Vedantic School, the eternal māyā śakti of Brahman is rather spiritual compared to the theistic schools of the Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas where the Śakti achieves greater personification.

ŚŪRYA AND VIṢṆU

Beside the prevalent sentiment of the period, Viṣṇu's Vedic as well as post-Vedic characteristics seem to have influenced this union between the two. The Rgvedic Viṣṇu has a solar character. He is one of the Ādityas or the manifestations of the Sun.¹ He represents the sun in its daily and yearly course.² His fame rests on the three strides with which he crosses the heaven, trīṇi padā vi cakrame viṣṇurgopā adābhyah.³ In this respect, he seems to be a personification of the light especially of the sun, as these three paces have been explained as denoting the threefold manifestations of light in the form of fire, lightning and the sun or as designating the three daily stations of the sun in his rising, culminating and setting.⁴ The fourteenth adhyāya of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa tells how the severed head of Viṣṇu became the sun.⁵

Grierson surmises that the Bhāgavata creed was a

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1. Wilson, H., Introduction to the Rgveda, p. 28; cf: Bhg. Gītā, X, 21.
 2. Haug, M., Translation of the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa of the Rgveda, p. 1, f.n. 1.
 3. RV., 1, 22, 18.
 4. Williams, M.M., SED., p. 999, (a) (b).
 5. ŚBr., XIV, 1, 1, 5-10.

development of the Sun-worship that was the common heritage of both branches of the Aryan people, the Iranians and the Indians. All the legends dealing with the Bhāgavata religion are somehow or other connected with the sun.¹ Viṣṇu's connection with Sūrya is also indicated in the Gāyatri hymn where Nārāyaṇa is described as Savitṛmandala madhyavartin, residing in the middle of the orb of the sun.²

One of the primary emblems of Viṣṇu is the discus, his Sudarśana Cakra, and the basic idea underlying in its association is solar.³ In fact, the discus or the wheel as a symbol par excellence of the god is one of the tangible signs of his connection with the Vedic Viṣṇu, an aspect of the Sun. (In this context, it may be said that the Sudarśana is the earliest recognisable attribute of Viṣṇu and in the Pañcarātra Samhitās, Lakṣmī is his Sudarśana).⁴ The Garuḍa, his conveyance and the lotus, (another of his emblems which was added, possibly, after his association with Lakṣmī) are also

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1. Grierson, op. cit., IA., 1908, p. 253. Cf: The Khoh Copper Plate Inscription of Sarvanātha which throws some light on the relation between the Bhāgavatas and the Sun worship, 'bhāgavat padānam āditsā(tya) bhāttāraka', C99, III, No. 28, p. 127, line 15.
 2. Cf: Ramachandra Rao, S.K., 'The conception of Sarasvatī', Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society, Vol. XLIX, No. 4, Jan. 1959, p. 222.
 3. Cf. Macdonell, A.Ā., Ved. Myth, p. 155.
 4. lakṣmyāḥ sudarśanī kalā, Ahir. Samh., III, 45; 4: V, 12.

connected with solar legends.¹

Even in later times, Viṣṇu has been identified with the sun. In the Mahābhārata he says: 'assuming the form of the sun I cover the universe with my rays. And because I am the home of all creatures, I am called by the name Vāsudeva';² and it can be said that iconographically, the Sun resembles closely his Vāsudeva image not only in general appearance, but also in many details. Possibly the Sun is his Rājasī Mūrti (form of activity), Anantaśāyī and Balarāma, the Tāmasī, while Vāsudeva is the Sāttvika one.³

Moreover, there are the syncretistic icons of Sūrya-Nārāyaṇa that can be found all over India. As we will see later, it is in this close connection between Sūrya and Viṣṇu that we find an explanation of the figure of Lakṣmī (and sometimes of Bhū) being sculptured on the side of Viṣṇu as his beloved consort.⁴

1. Cf. divyah suparna garutmān, RV, I, 164, 46; for lotus and the Sun, see ERE, Vol. VIII, pp. 142-5. The association of the lotus with the Sun is borne out by textual injunctions which enjoin the execution in sculpture of a twelve petalled lotus on different petals of which figures of the different aspects of the Sun should be engraved with the image of Bhaskara on the central pericarp. Hemādri's Vratakhanda, p. 553. Cf: Banerjea, J.N., 'Surya in Brahmanical Art'; IA., LIV, 1925, pp.

2. chādyāmi jagad viśvam bhūtvā sūrya ivamśubhiḥ 1
sarvabhūtādhi vāsāscā vāsudevas tato hyam 11
Mbh. XII, 341, 4.

3. Bhattacharya, B., Indian Images, p. 18.

4. Cf. also Taitt. Samh., IV, 1, 3; 2, 8.

SŪRYA AND LAKṢMĪ

Śrī-Lakṣmī seems to have been connected with the sun from a very early period. Some of her epithets in the Śrīsūkta such as hiraṇmayīm (golden), ādityavarnā (of the complexion of the sun), jvalantīm (burning) and especially Sūryā,¹ reveal a close connection between her and Sūrya. Sūrya's wife and daughter are both wellknown as Sūryā, and N.N. Sarmachaudhury considers Uṣā (Sūrya's wife) to be the Vedic goddess of whom Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī are the replicas.² Uṣas, who in the Rgveda is described as one who shines (śriye-smayate),³ resembles Lakṣmī in various other ways as well. Like Śrī-Lakṣmī, Uṣas is implored to grant wealth⁴ and is said to arise (as Dawn) from the ocean every morning; Śrī-Lakṣmī is also born of the ocean of milk (kṣīrābdhi tanayā) and this idea could have originated from such a close connection between the two. Further, the many petalled spread of the lotus which denotes spacial expanse, corresponds to Uṣā with its movements; Lakṣmī is the embodiment of it.

1. Śrīs., verses, 4, 5, 14; Mahānār. Up., I, 12.

2. Sarmachaudhury, N.N., 'Goddess Lakṣmī in the Purāna and Tantra', Poona Orientalist, XIII, Nos. 122; Jan. 2 April, 1948, p. 5.

3. RV., I 92, 6.

4. Cf: Gonda, J., AEV, p. 181.

Moreover, Uṣas is just another manifestation of Aditi(mātā devānām aditeranīkam)¹ who again resembles Lakṣmī. Thus the connection between Uṣas and Lakṣmī and Uṣas and Sūrya seems to have led to some sort of association between Sūrya and Lakṣmī.

✓ In the Aiteraya Brāhmaṇa,² a number of great kings is said to be like 'Āditya (the sun) established in Śrī'; obtaining tribute from all quarters, they give heat. This obviously refers only to an abstract concept of Śrī; in it lie the roots of her relationship with Āditya. since the idea seems to have arisen of a King being wedded to Śrī.³

Further, as has been said above, Śrī-Lakṣmī is the embodiment of the lotus flower, the favourite of the sun. In the Śrī-Sūkta, where she is first conceived as a concrete goddess, Śrī is compared to the lotus in every possible way.⁴ In the Mahābhārata, Śrī says, 'I am that Padmā, that Śrī, decked with lotuses, who sprung from the lotus that blooms at the touch of the rays of Sūrya, for the prosperity of the creatures', (sāhamvai paṅkaje jātā sūryaraśmivibodhite 1

1. RV, I, 113, 19.

2. Ait. Br., VII, 34, 9f, cf: Gonda, J., AEV., p. 189.

3. She is possibly conceived here as a female being. See also ŚBr., II, 4, 4, 6.

4. Cf: the chapter on the Śrīsūkta. For sun & lotus, cf: Banerjea, J.N., DHI, p. 138.

bhūtyartham sarvabhūtānām padmā śrīḥ padmamālinī).¹

The lotus blooms in response to the rising of the sun, in answer to and as a reflection of the light of heaven mirrored on the surface of the water. Earth is stretched out, as a reflection of heaven, in a like manner. The Aiteraya Brāhmaṇa refers to this world as the counter-part of the yonder world.² Hence the two lotuses held by the Sun in iconography, corresponding to the upper and the nether waters, parā and aparā prakṛti,³ actually represent Śrī and Bhū, who were, in later times, two favourite consorts of Viṣṇu. According to S.B. Das-Gupta, this representation of Viṣṇu with Śrī and Bhū on his either side, retains the essential characteristics of the Sun.⁴

Lastly, we might refer to the already mentioned Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā passage which refers to Śrī and Lakṣmī as the two wives of the Parama puruṣa⁵ who is Prajāpati-Brahmā and appears as the visible phenomenon of the Sun. We have already discussed the manner in which all the qualities and

1. Mbh., XII, 221, 20 (Poona Ed.).

2. Ait. Br., VII, 2.

3. Coomeraswamy, A.K., Elements of Buddhist Iconography, pp. 20-21.

4. SBDG, BSSS, p. 17.

5. Vāj. Saṃh., XXXI, 22.

activities of Brahmā were transferred to Viṣṇu,¹ an aspect of the Sun, and thus it is not surprising that in due course, Śrī and Lakṣmī, now one and the same goddess, would hold the position of the wife of Viṣṇu who is then regarded as the Parama puruṣa or the supreme god. The Bhāgavata believes that Viṣṇu himself was the supreme Puruṣa, referred to in the Puruṣa-sūkta, and thus naturally Śrī and Lakṣmī are conferred on him.²

1. Cf: Supra, pp. 93, 94 ; also Brahm. P., 1, 4, 27; 5, 140; 6, 57; Mark. P., XLVII, 4.

2. According to Ahirbudhnya Samhitā, (LIX, 2-39; Schrader, F.O., Introduction to the Pāncaratra and the Ahirbudhnya Samhitā, p. 143f.) the Puruṣa of the Puruṣasūkta is essentially vasudeva and his association with Śrī-Lakṣmī is regarded as that of Puruṣa and Prakṛti.

AGNI

Again, Viṣṇu being a solar god and Agni representing a form of the sun, there may be some sort of connection between them. In the Rgveda, Viṣṇu of the wide steps and fire are sometimes identified.¹ The fastening of the world is ascribed to Agni and to Viṣṇu in almost the same manner.²

Śrī is at the same time, closely associated with Agni. In the Śrīsūkta,³ Agni Jātavedas is supplicated to bring Śrī Lakṣmī to her worshippers. In the Rgveda, it is said that the gods placed the lovely Śrī in Agni.⁴ All Śrī is to be seen in Agni's excellent outward appearance.⁵ In this aspect, she has been mentioned a few times in the Vedas with Agni; Agni who abides in every piece of wood, displays Śrī when kindled.⁶ In another place⁷ Agni is called the 'highest vigour, wealth and prosperity'; in his enviable

1. RV, II, 1, 3.

2. Cf: RV, 1, 22, 18 (viṣṇur gopā adābhya) & VI, 7, 7 ([agnir] 'dabdhogopā).

3. Śrīs., verses, 1, 15.

4. RV., 1, 72, 10.

5. Ib., II, 10, 1.

6. Ib., V, 28, 4.

7. Ib., II, 1, 12.

colour, the śriyaḥ are stated to be present. Another verse states 'Thy śriyaḥ are like the lightnings of the rain clouds'.¹

Thus from a consideration of the frequent connections between Agni and the range of ideas centering in the forms and names of Śrī, it may be said that this relation between Agni and Viṣṇu was based upon a community of interests and similarity of activities rather than their resemblances to natural phenomenon.²

Certain Vedic prototypes of Śrī-Lakṣmī may be cited as the determining factors in installing her image beside Viṣṇu. The most suggestive one of them is Sīnīvālī who has been explicitly mentioned in the Atharvaveda as the wife of Viṣṇu.³ We can also mention Aditi in this respect.⁴ Although they resemble Lakṣmī to some extent, I doubt if they had any formidable role in this regard.

Lastly, we should not rule out the own individual characteristics of Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu as of considerable importance for such a consequence. According to the late concept of trinity, Viṣṇu is the preserver of the universe and the earthly abundance that he is supposed to preserve is embodied

1. Ib. X, 91, 5.

2. Cf: Conda, J., AEV, p. 114.

3. AV., VII, 46, 3.

4. Cf: Supra, pp. 102ff.

in the very concept of Śrī-Lakṣmī. Thus while Śrī is closely associated with this earthly life and its maintenance, the avatāras or descendents of Viṣṇu, in their ever increasing number, introduce him in the character of a loving and compassionate god, by bringing him into close contact with humanity. This, eventually leads to an obvious and intimate relationship between Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu; the preserver takes the position of the husband.

SRI AND VIṢṆU IN LATER MYTHOLOGY

The union of Śrī with Viṣṇu reaches its consummation in the later period of Epics and Purāṇas. Gandhārī or the power of illusion of Viṣṇu is equated with Lakṣmī, gandhārī (gāhvarī) tu smṛtā māyā (mayā) jagadbandhayā vaiṣṇavī.¹ The Harivaṃśa says that when Viṣṇu took the form of varāha, his shadow was his wife.² In the Bhāgavata purāṇa, Viṣṇu says, 'Lakṣmī is a subtle portion of me, I am a refuge to her'.³ Lakṣmī, who is infamous for her fickleness, who is very unreliable and unstable, who can never stay in one place long enough, 'could never leave Viṣṇu'.⁴ The Jayākhyā Saṃhitā, a Pañcarātra work, describes Viṣṇu as Kamalā-Kāmuka (lover of Lakṣmī) and Lakṣmī vallabha (Lakṣmī's beloved).⁵ In the list of Viṣṇu's thousand names, Śrīśa, Śrīvāsa, Śrīmān, Śrīnivāsa, Śrīpati, Śrīmatāmvara, Śrīda, Śrīnidhi, Śrībhaṇḍavana, Śrīdhara, Śrīkara, Lakṣmīvān, all these names which were to be muttered daily, prove the importance of Śrī in the cult of Viṣṇu.⁶

1. Viṣdh. P., III, 60, 3.

2. Hariv., I, 41, 35.

3. Bhg. P., VIII, 4, 20.

4. Ib., I, 11, 26; Cf: X, 5, 18; XI, 14, 39; XII, 11, 20.

5. Jay. Saṃh., I, 43, 44.

6. Mbh., XIII, 149 (Poona Ed.).

The Viṣṇu purāṇa¹ describes the inseparability of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī as it states that "in like manner as Hari descends in the world in various shapes - so does his consort Śrī. Thus when Hari was born as a dwarf, as a son of Aditi, Lakṣmī appeared from a lotus (as Padmā or Kamalā); when he was born as Rāma of the race of Bhṛgu (or Paraśurāma), she was Dharanī; when he was Rāghava, she was Sītā, and when he was Kṛṣṇa, she became Rukmiṇī. In the other descents of Viṣṇu, she is his associate. If he takes a celestial form, she appears as divine; if a mortal, she becomes a mortal too, transforming her own person agreeably to whatever character it pleases Viṣṇu to put on".²

The Bhāgavata purāṇa³ says that Prṛthu is a portion of Viṣṇu whereas Arcci (his wife) is a portion of Lakṣmī. He was born to save the earth from destruction, and as Lakṣmī cannot stay without Bhagavān, she was also born.

In the Viṣṇupurāṇa, there is a beautiful chapter⁴ depicting their one-ness, their harmony and co-operation:

"Śrī, the bride of Viṣṇu, the mother of the world, is eternal, imperishable; in like manner as he is all pervading, so also is she, oh best of the Brahmanas, omnipresent. Viṣṇu is meaning;

1. Vis. P., I, 9.

2. Hazra, R.P. & Wilson, H.H., Viṣṇu Purāṇa, p. 69.

3. Bhg. P., IV, 15, 1-6.

4. Viṣ. P., I, 8, 15ff.

She is speech. Hari is polity (Nyāya); She is prudence (Nīti), Viṣṇu is understanding; She is intellect. He is righteousness; She is devotion. He is creator; Śrī is creation. Śrī the earth; Hari the support of it. The deity is content; the eternal Lakṣmī is resignation. He is desire, She is wish. He is sacrifice, She is sacrificial donation (Dakṣinā). The goddess is the invocation which attends the oblation; Janārdana is the oblation. Lakṣmī is the chamber where the females are present (at a religious ceremony); Madhusūdana the apartment of the males of the family. Lakṣmī is the altar; Hari the stake (to which the victim is bound). Śrī is the fuel; Hari the holy grass (Kuśa). He is the personified Sāmaveda; the goddess, lotus throned, is the tone of its chanting. Lakṣmī is the prayer of oblation (Svāhā); Vāsudeva, the lord of the world, is the sacrificial fire. Saurī (Viṣṇu) is Śankara (Śiva); and Śrī the bride of Śiva (Gaurī). Keśava, Oh Maitreya, is the Sun and his radiance is the lotus-seated goddess. Viṣṇu is the tribe of progenitors (pitrgana); Padmā is their bride (Svadhā), the eternal bestower of nutriment. Śrī is the heavens, Viṣṇu, who is one with all things, is wide extended space. The lord of Śrī is the moon; She is his unfading light. She is called the moving principle of the world; he, the wind which bloweth everywhere. Govinda is the ocean; Lakṣmī its shore. Lakṣmī is the consort of Indra (Indrānī); Madhusūdana is Devendra. The holder of the discus (Viṣṇu) is Yama (the regent of Tartarus), the lotus-throned goddess is his dusky spouse (Dhumornā). Śrī is the wealth, Śrīdhara (Viṣṇu) is himself the god of riches (Kubera). Lakṣmī, illustrious Brahman, is Gaurī; and Keśava is the deity of the ocean (varuṇa). Śrī is the host of heaven (Devasenā); the deity of war, her lord is Hari. The wielder of the mace is resistance; the power to oppose is Śrī. Lakṣmī is the Kāṣṭha and the Kalā; Hari the Nimesa and the Muhūrta. Lakṣmī is the light; and Hari, who is all the lord of all, the lamp. She, the mother of the world, is the creeping vine; and Viṣṇu the tree round which she clings. She is the night; the god who is armed with the mace and discus is the day. He, the bestower of blessings; is the bridegroom;

the padmāsana goddess is the bride. The god is one with all male - the goddess one with all female. The lotus-eyed deity is the standard; padmāsana goddess is the banner. Lakṣmī is cupidity; Nārāyaṇa, the master of the world, is covetousness. Oh thou who knowest what righteousness is, Govinda is love; and Lakṣmī, his gentle spouse, is pleasure. But why thus diffusely enumerate their presence: - it is enough to say, in a word, that of gods, animals, and men, Hari is all that is called male; Lakṣmī is all that is termed female: there is nothing else than they".¹

The Mahābhārata describes Viṣṇu as sākṣāt lakṣ-
myāivavāsāh,² 'like the abode of Lakṣmī herself'. In another place, it says, 'Śrī dwells within him and he dwells always associated with her'.³ In his adoration of Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna says, 'In thy grace is the goddess of prosperity, verily, Śrī is always established in thee, O thou of the highest intelligence'.⁴ Often the conception is but half personal, i.e. 'Śrī beautifies Viṣṇu'.⁵

The Āgamas also reflect upon the philosophical and mythological aspects of Viṣṇu's Śakti as it states "

"Between his (Viṣṇu's) eternal and unchanging nature, beyond the three strands, yet capable of evolving the world, and the actual scene

1. Hazra, R.C. & Wilson, H.H., Vis. P., pp. 52-53.

2. Mbh., III, 188, 95.

3. Ib., XIII, 147, 14.

4. Ib., XIV, 52, 12.

5. Rām., II, 118, 20 etc.

of our existence, is Prakṛti. She is conceived as a woman, with the three strands for her essence. The universe is of her making and she sustains it by Iśvara's command. Mythologically she is identified with Viṣṇu's consort Lakṣmī. Philosophically she is Vācūdeva's Śakti, the everlasting cause of all effects, his Ahanta, the consciousness of all knowing and all seeing of all beings, without which his 'ego' is unknowable. To desire to create is her nature. Of her own free will, she manifests the world and she becomes at once the knower and the known".¹

Thus Śrī Lakṣmī seems to symbolise Viṣṇu's "creative energy, his potency, the power with which he is eternally associated and which enables him to become the efficient and the material causes of the universe".² Thereupon, in the later period, Lakṣmī appears not only with an independent status of her own, but also as the wife of Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa. It is possibly the growing importance of the Viṣṇu cult which has led to the coupling of these two divinities. At the same time, it is undeniable that Lakṣmī, who was the most popular deity amongst the traders and merchants and agriculturists, as well as being intimately tied to royalty, when recognised as Viṣṇu's wife led to the penetration of Vaiṣṇavism among the masses.

Thus Śrī-Lakṣmī has been delineated in her dual aspect in Gupta iconography. We find her on innumerable Gupta coins in her own capacity symbolising every object that the

1. Śrīnivāsa Aiyanger, Pillāipundagudī Tiruvēṅga, Outlines of Indian Philosophy, p. 178f.

2. Gonda, J., AEV., p. 229.

Gupta kings intended to achieve as well as massaging Viṣṇu's feet typifying a devoted Hindu wife. Here again the true concept of Puruṣa and Prakṛti is realised where Prakṛti, viewed simply as a female partner of Puruṣa, is made to play a very important and yet a subordinate role in the creation of the universe.

LAKṢMĪ AND INDRA

But it is a late epic trait to make Śrī Lakṣmī exclusively Viṣṇu's consort. Before that, she was often attached to other divine personalities. Her association with Kubera has been discussed.¹ The Viṣṇudharmottara purāṇa² recognises her as one of the wives of Kāla. Śrī was also allied to Indra at a time when Indra was till the mightiest of the gods.

This association with Indra is apparent from a passage of the Mahābhārata³ where the polyandry of Draupadī is justified on the ground that Draupadī was an incarnation of Śrī and the five Pāṇḍavas of the five former Indras.

How Draupadī got five husbands is told in a story about a lovely maiden (born of a Rṣi) who was beautiful and chaste. She performed tapas five times in order to get a husband, and Śaṅkara, being pleased, gave her the boon that she would get five husbands, because of her fivefold prayer.

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1. Supra, p. 60 ff. . Lakṣmī has also been associated with Gaṇeśa. But the iconographic injunctions as well as their executions ascribable to a late period suggest this attachment to be a later development. Cf: DHI., p. 358.
 2. Cf: Govinda Chandra, Prācīn Bhārat meṁ Lakṣmī pratimā, p. 51.
 3. MBH., I, 189, 29 & 133.

Thus, five Indras were asked to be born as human beings in the world of men, while the lady of beauty, who was none other than Śrī herself, was appointed by Mahādeva as their common wife. Nārāyaṇa approved of it and Arjuna, who was a portion of Śakra, was the most beloved of Draupadī. Draupadī was born in an extraordinary way, from within the earth, by virtue of the sacrificial rites.¹

Vyāsa tells Drupada, 'the celestial Śrī, having undergone sever tapas, has, for the sake of the Pāṇḍavas, taken her birth as your daughter, in the course of your grand sacrifice. That lovely goddess, waited upon by all the celestials, shall, as a consequence of her own acts, become the common wife of five husbands. It is for this that the self-created has created her', svarga-Śrī pāṇḍavārthāya tu samutpannā mahāmakhe.²

Indra says to Yudhiṣṭhira, referring to Draupadī, 'This one is Śrī herself. It was for your sake that she took birth, as the daughter of Drupada, among human beings. For your pleasure, she was created by the wielder of the trident'.³ Another verse says 'This lady, of eyes as expansive as lotus

1. Mbh., I, 197. This story recalls the legendary birth of Sītā and is possibly intended to emphasise Draupadī's divine aspect. Elsewhere, she is called 'dehāntargatā mahī', Earth incarnate. Yuga Purāṇa, II, 72-73.

2. Ib., I, 197, 57.

3. Mbh., XVIII, 4, 11-12.

petals, who seems to have touched the middle age of life, whose complexion resembles that of the blue lotus, and who looks like a goddess of heaven, is Kriṣṇā, the embodied form of the goddess of prosperity'.¹ The passage describes Draupadī as possessing the complexion of the blue lotus, (nīlotpalābhā), and the iconographic texts also prescribe a dark complexion for Śrī Lakṣmī.²

But the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa³ does not mention Śrī at all and just states that it was Indra's wife who became incarnated as Draupadī. This suggests that Śrī could be Indra's wife.

There are other stories about Śrī's direct association with Indra as well. In the Śāntiparva of the Mahābhārata⁴ it is stated that when Bali, the king of the asuras lost his virtues, he was abandoned by Śrī who came to Indra to dwell with him.

Bali told Indra not to be too proud of his acquired riches as Śrī is very fickle, does not dwell long in one place, and is unstable, and that formerly she was attained by thousands of Indras all of whom were much superior to the

1. Ib., XV, 25, 9.

2. Devī P., L, 27, 'śyāmāṅgīm'.

3. Mārkaṇḍeya P., V, 24ff.

4. Mbh., XII, 224.

present Indra.¹ Bali may here be referring to the tradition that Śrī had belonged to Indra (or perhaps to another Indra) before she came to Bali, a story which is told in the Hari-vaṁśa.² It states that when Bali, the king of the asuras, was victorious over Indra, he was installed as the heavenly monarch and Lakṣmī, taking a lotus in her hand, approached him and said that she was very pleased with his victory:

'You have displayed so much valour in your struggle with Indra that I could not keep myself from coming to you. I am certain that you will be able to enjoy the prosperity of these three worlds'. With these words Śrī entered Bali's parlour, followed by Āśā, Kīrti, Dyuti, Prabhā, Dhṛti, Kṣamā, Bhūti, Nīti, Vidyā, Dayā, Mati, Smṛti, Medhā, Lajjā, Vapupuṣṭi, Śrūti, Prīti, Idā, Śānti, Vṛddhi, and Kṛpā.

Then as Bali, blinded by ignorance and afflicted by time, began to boast that his adoration towards Lakṣmī was ceaseless, she deserted him (Indra saw her issuing out of the form of high souled Bali, śatakraturathāpaśyadbalerdīptām mahātmanah 1 svarūpiṇīm śrīrādvī tadā niṣkrāmatīm śriyam 11'),³ and came to dwell in Indra. She told Indra 'Thou should bear

1. Ib., XII, 225.

2. Hariv., III, 65. .

3. Mbh., XII, 225, 1.

me without heedlessness, and with penance and prowess'.¹

She admits that there is no one who can keep her forever, but tells Indra that she might be able to dwell in him if he divides her into four parts according to the ordinance laid down in the Vedas. Indra apportions one-quarter of her essence to dwell in the earth, another in the waters, the third in fire, and the fourth in good men who are devoted to the Brāhmanas and truthful in speech.²

Then followed for a time a golden age, when Śrī came and dwelt with Indra. But prosperity led Indra to fall into evil ways. The Purāṇas³ state that once, being insulted by Indra, Durvāsā cursed him to be devoid of Lakṣmī. Then, at Viṣṇu's command, Lakṣmī, who hid in the depth of the water, was churned out. As she came forth, she went to Viṣṇu of her own accord. Indra priased her, which pleased Śrī, who promised that she would never leave him.

This episode, while revealing Śrī-Indra relationship in an explicit manner, also maintain the fact that Śrī's association with Viṣṇu was a later event in the history of the goddess. This is further corroborated when the story of Śrī coming to reside with Indra is told in a different fashion

1. Ib., 15.

2. Ib., 19-29.

3. Viṣ. P., I, 89, 105, Viṣdh. P., I, 41, 1.

in a later chapter in the Mahābhārata with a Vaiṣṇava setting, i.e. 'Riding upon Viṣṇu's vehicle adorned with garuḍa and Sūrya himself, that object blazed forth with unrivalled splendour and seemed to illuminate the three worlds. The object they saw was none other than Śrī herself.¹ Nārada and Indra offered her a joyful welcome All the deities, hearing the news, assembled in a pure and desirable spot and waited there in expectation of beholding Maghavat with Lakṣmī beside him. Then Indra, Nārada and Śrī came, receiving honours from all'. etc. etc.²

A close analysis will reveal that these legendary accounts, although ascertain some kind relationship between Śrī and Indra, nevertheless suggest that it is the abstract concept of Śrī which was responsible for this association. This idea has been reflected not only in the Garuḍa Purāṇa passage where Purandara (Indra) is called Śrīpati (evidently in his character as the king of affluence; Śrī belongs to kings, Indra is Devarāja) and Śrīmān (tatrāste śrīpatiḥ śrīmān sahasrākṣaḥ puraṇḍarah),³ but also in the more conclusive Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa document where Śrī-Lakṣmī is associated

1. Mbh., XII, 229, 12-15.

2. Ib., 87ff.

3. Garuḍa P., XXXIV, 75.

with Indra in the form of Svargalakṣmī Śacī.¹ This finds even further support when it is related that with her yogic power, Lakṣmī took various forms and in Svarga (heaven) as Svargalakṣmī, she becomes Indra's sampat svarūpini,² in pātāla, she is Nāgalakṣmī; with the kings, Rajalakṣmī and among the common people, she is gr̥halakṣmī offering boons to everyone. This offers an explanation to the Epic story of Śrī being incarnated as Draupadī which is suggestive of her conjugal relationship with Indra, as has been related above. The story is an eventual and unavoidable misinterpretation of the original idea where Svargaśrī (possibly Śacī) was intended to be born as Draupadī. The probability of this hypothesis is strengthened by another Mahābhārata passage³ where Śrī and Lakṣmī seem to be superfluous since Śacī as Mahendrānī is present beside Indra; hence the former two may be regarded as representing prosperity and affluence.

While dealing with Indra's relation with Śrī and her abstract concept, we might refer to one of Indra's traits, emphasising a prominent role in fertility and vegetative life, being the first god who was accorded worship in order to ensure

1. Kramrishh, Viṣdh. P., p. 74.

2. Devi Bhg. P., 9th Kh., XXXIX, 14-20; Cf: BVP., Prak. Kh., XXXV, 18-24, 'Svarge ca svargalakṣmīśer śakrasampatsvarūpini'.

3. Mbh., II, 7, 4.

a good harvest. In this character he has very often been associated with the goddess of the furrow, the furrow herself, Sītā,¹ who has even been mentioned as his wife in the Grhya Sūtras² and who has her own share in the offerings made when ploughing starts.³ The Rgveda invokes Indra to win tilth; he is lord of tilth,⁴ and as such he is besought, in co-operation with Puṣan, to reduce the furrow to the right condition.⁵ Again, in some places, he is called the lord or husband of Urvarā, 'The fertile land'.⁶ He is also called the bull of the Earth,⁷ who herself was very often regarded as a cow.

Thus, it is possibly the same characteristics which connected Indra with Earth and Sītā⁸ (who were closely related to Śrī Lakṣmī) also influenced his intimacy with Śrī. But

1. For ~~other~~ references, Cf: Gonda, AEV., p. 29.

2. Pār. Gr. Sūt., II, 17, 9, where she is described as beautiful

3. Gobh. Gr. Sūt., IV, 4, 28ff.

4. RV., II, 21, 1, VI, 20, 1.

5. Ib., IV, 57, 7.

6. RV., VII, 21, 3.

7. Ib., XII, 1, 6.

8. Here we may recall how Indra being the deity of wealth releases rain to impregnate the earth. Cf: also the Viśdh. P. (1, 41, 25), while describing Lakṣmī compares her with Sītā as 'kāṛṣakānam tathā sītā sasya śobhā mahitale'.

this was broken off in favour of Viṣṇu in accordance with Indra's gradual decline and Viṣṇu's rise to prominence;¹ the implication of Viṣṇu's inferiority in the epithet Upendra (Indra being Mahendra) was defiantly replaced by Atīndra,² and by the time of the Mahābhārata, the churning of the ocean could be done only with Viṣṇu's assistance.

But the tie between Indra and Śrī was not completely cut off, as is evident from Śrī Lakṣmī's promise never to leave Indra.³ Even in the Kojāgarī pūjā, which is exclusively Lakṣmī's, Indra had his share, and this does not seem to be merely incidental, for in the Āśvina festival, which is also associated with Lakṣmī, he is given full importance.

Gradually Indra was accorded just the position of a brother of Viṣṇu, as is evident from the verse 'rāma lakṣman-
yormadhye sītā rājati te snuṣā 1 viṣṇuvāsavayor madhye padmā

1. Cf: Hopkim, E.W., Epic Mythology, p. 204.

2. Mbh., XIII, 49, 24, 108 etc. The Alina C.P. Inscription of Śilāditya may be interesting in this respect. It states:- 'the goddess of Sovereignty (Lakṣmī), even while she was still an object to be longed for by (his) elder (brother), who, excessively full of respect (for him) (behaved) as if he were (the god Indra) the elder (brother) of Upendra (thus indicating Viṣṇu). Fleet, C99., III, pp. 174, 181, No. 39, line 4.

3. Viṣ. P., I, 9, 105, Viṣdh. P., I, 41, 1.

śrīr iva rūpini' ll.¹ Here Sītā between Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa is compared to Śrī between Viṣṇu and Vāsava (Indra).

1. Rām., II, 60, 13. (Gorresior's Ed.) Cf. Rām., II, 60, Baroda Ed.) p. 324, f.n. 1307.

KĀRTTIKEYA

It has also been suggested that Lakṣmī was once associated with Kārttikeya. In this context, we may refer to some coins already mentioned above which depict Lakṣmī and Kārttikeya on its two sides.¹ In the Mahābhārata, Lakṣmī is one of the various names of Devasenā, others being Saṣṭhī, Āsā, Sukhapradā, Sīnīvālī and Kubū.² In the details of the story it is stated how once Skanda (Kārttikeya) after attaining all good characteristics was reposing himself while Śrī, looking like an embodied lotus came and rendered her diligence to him; he was thus possessed of fortune.³ It further illustrates that when Skanda married Devasenā, Lakṣmī in her incarnate form began to dwell with him. As Skanda was united with Śrī on the fifth day, the day is known as Śrī-pāñcamī,⁴

All these references but invariably indicate that it was not Śrī Lakṣmī herself, rather her abstract concept which was associated with Kārttikeya. It is further substantiated by such assertions that as Lakṣmī approached, Kārttikeya

1. Supra, pp.67,68.

2. Mbh., iii, 218, 47. (Poona Ed.)

3. Ib., 218, 3.

4. Ib., 218, 48.

5. Ib., 218, 49.

was possessed of fortune. Overemphasis on her taking a concrete form further supports this idea and the statement 'when Skanda married Devasenā, Lakṣmī herself in her incarnate form dwelt with him' does not by any mean suggest Lakṣmī's association with Kārttikeya. It rather describes Devasenā as an impersonification of her.¹ The inclusion of Lakṣmī's name in the enumeration of the different names of Devasenā as well as her depiction with Kārttikeya on coins was possibly due to Lakṣmī's association with Ṣaṣṭhi² who was connected with the Child-god Kārttikeya as the goddess of Child-birth.

1. In this context it may be noted that personification of abstractions which is a common feature in India is also suggested in the case of Devasenā. Devasenā originally meant 'the army (Senā) of the gods (deva) of which Kārttikeya was the Lord (pati). Eventually the Lord took the position of the husband while Devasenā became personified as his bride.

2. Supra, p.36.

The Matsya purāṇa¹ relates a story of Lakṣmī's love for Soma (the Moon). Once, after the conclusion of the Rājasūya Yajña, the goddess Lakṣmī, along with eight other goddesses, viz. Sīnīvālī, Dyuti, Puṣṭi, Prabhā, Kuhū, Kīrti, Vasu and Dhṛti, went to see Soma and, being inflamed with passion by his exquisite form, they proceeded to him, leaving behind their respective husbands, Nārāyaṇa, Kardama, Vibhavasū, Dhātā, Prabhākara, Haviṣmat, Jayanta, Marīca, Kāśyapa and Nandī. Janārdanācārya and Anantācārya tried to justify the act on the ground that it was out of their motherly love for a son,² but this interpretation does not look likely in view of the fact that the text explicitly uses the phrases, 'kāmabānābhitaṅga³ 'inflamed (being shot by) the arrow of passion' and svakīyaivamkāmayāmāsa⁴ 'he desired (them) as if (they were) his own'. Later Soma was cursed because of this act, and this also rules out the possibility of the

1. Mat. P., XXIII.

2. Janārdanācārya & Anantācārya, Matsya Purāṇa, Vol. 1, pp. 167-169, f.n.

3. Mat. P., XXIII, 23ff.

4. Ib., 26.

interpretation of maternal affection.¹

Since the very age of the Rgveda, Śrī has been associated with Soma. He is constantly described as the bestower of śrī;² the soma juice is said to afford all the śriyah³ and he is said to be the Śreṣṭha of the plants.⁴ Even in connection with the Soma vaṁśa or Chandra vaṁśa (the Lunar dynasty), we may recall the fact that Śrī belongs to kings. Śrī is addressed as Candrā in the Śrisūkta⁵ and Viṣṇu has sometimes been identified with Soma.⁶ But despite the importance of these facts, it is doubtful if they were in any way effective in building up this story.

We should not evade the question of the sacrifice

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1. V.S. Agawala tries to evade their blemishes by finding a symbolical description of these nine goddesses (referred to as nine Matrkās by him) who love Soma. According to him, the mātrkās refer to the principle of Vāk or speech love the single principle of Soma or the mind. Matsya Purāṇa, a Study, p. 130.
 2. RV., IX, 94, 4. Here Soma is regarded as śriyam vasānāh. Cf: Macdonell, Vedic Mythology, p. 110. In the SBr (IV, 1, 3, 9) Soma is Śrī and as at the approach of the Śreyas, the inferior descends from his seat, so at the sight of Soma, evil bow down before him.
 3. RV., IX, 16, 6; 62, 9.
 4. AV., XI, 6, 15.
 5. Śrīs., verse 2.
 6. SBr., III, 6, 3, 19; Cf: also III, 2, 4, 12. In the Mbh. (XIII, 149, 67), Soma is another name for Viṣṇu.

either which was followed by the event of the goddesses' love for the Moon. The sacrifice was in order to gain a supremacy over Indra and thus the result was a natural and obvious outcome, the goddess of fortune came to abide with him.¹

But the most relevant reason seems to be an attempt to glorify Soma's beauty which could attract even Śrī-Lakṣmī, who herself is a goddess of beauty and this reflects upon the feminine weakness for beauty. The total absence of the story elsewhere (apart from the Harivaṃśa which mentions the nine goddesses only as attending the sacrifice)² further supports this assumption. Only one incidental reference to a relation between Śrī and Soma is found. In the Rāmāyaṇa, a passage, while refers to Sītā's confinement in Rāvaṇa's palace, compares her with Lakṣmī who as dwells with Vaiśṛava^{ra}, Moon and Indra,, lived in the palace of Rāvaṇa.³

Thus, apart from this case which can be stated as an

1. The Rājasūya Sacrifice which is intimately associated with sovereignty and thus with Śrī, requires the performance of the abhiṣeka which is done according to the rites of a Soma Sacrifice. Haugh, M., Translation of the Aitareya Brahmana of the Rgveda, pp. 495-496, f.n.

2. Hariv., I, 25,27.

3. Yā hi vaiśṛavane lakṣmīryā cendre harivāhane 1
sā rāvaṇagrhe śarvā nityamevānapāyini 11 etc. Rām., V, 9, 8f.

instance of the love of the fair sex for beauty, and which does not distinguish Lakṣmī in any way from the other goddesses, it is her abstract concept that seems to have connected Śrī Lakṣmī with other gods. But Lakṣmī manifests her love for Viṣṇu in her concrete visible form.¹ This is well expressed in a Mahābhārata passage when Śrī Lakṣmī tells Rukminī that she dwells in rivers, lotuses, bulls, elephants, maidens, ruling sovereigns and good men; she does not live with those who cause the inter-mixture of castes and neglect their varṇa duties. But everywhere else She lives only in spirit, while with Nārāyaṇa, She lives in her embodied form, nārāyaṇe-tvekamānā vasāmi sarveṇa bhāveṇa śarīrabhūtā.²

1. This is suggested also in the foregoing statement of the Ramayana (V, 9, 8f; Supra, p.152) which connects Lakṣmī with the Moon and Vaiśravaṇa and even with Rāvaṇa, but not with Viṣṇu conforming to the arguments sometimes found that it was not the real Sītā but the illusion that was confined in Rāvaṇa's palace.

2. Mbh., XII, 11, 6f. 19.

C H A P T E R V .

ŚRĪ-LAKSMĪ IN ICONOGRAPHY

GAJALAKṢMĪ

The gradual development of the representation of Śrī-Lakṣmī seems to have followed a bifurcated course. Originally an independent goddess, she was recognised from the Gupta period onwards as a consort or śakti of Viṣṇu, and the iconographic history of Lakṣmī also reveals that the goddess was sculpted alone as well as with Viṣṇu, in conformity with her dual character.

When represented as an independent goddess, Śrī-Lakṣmī assumes various forms. Eight different forms of Lakṣmī known as Aṣṭalakṣmī¹ are mentioned in different texts² and amongst them, Gajalakṣmī seems to be the

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1. At Mādurā, there are carvings of eight different Lakṣmīs who preside over eight different kinds of good luck. Williams, M.M., RTL., p. 182. According to the Padma Purāṇa, these eight Lakṣmīs correspond to the eight śaktis of Viṣṇu.
 2. For different Lakṣmīs cf: Viśdh.P., III, 82, 14; BVP., Prak.Kh., XXXV, 18-24; XXXIX, 58-59; Devi Bhg.P., IX, 39, 14-20. Earliest representations of Dipalakṣmī (which is very common in south India, Ganguly, O.C., South Indian Bronzes, p. 25, pl. xxxv, xxxvi) are found in the N.W. provinces of India. Cf: ASIAR., 1915-16, pl. v; Marshall, Taxila, vol. III, pl. cxxix, no. 141; Yajdani, S., 'The Lamp Bearer (Dipalakṣmī)', JISOA., vol. II, no. 1, p. 11, pl. viii; G. Oppert, in his book The Original Inhabitants of India (pp. 362-63) enumerates these eight Lakṣmīs as (a) Mahalakṣmī, the great Lakṣmī from whom others emanate; (b) Dhanalakṣmī, the goddess of wealth; (c) Dhānyalakṣmī (Dhānyasrī is mentioned as early as 126 A.D. in a Kusana inscription Ep. Ind., R.D. Banerji, p. 112, No. 5), the goddess or rice crop;

Continued over

earliest and the most frequent; it is found on terracottas and seals, on coins and in reliefs, from about the third century B.C. till the present day.

This motif is at once the most complicated and the most frequent composition met with in early Indian art and is therefore of great importance not only in connection with Śrī-Lakṣmī herself, but also for the general history of iconography.¹

The usual Gajalakṣmī motif shows the goddess seated on a lotus or standing on a lotus pedestal in a lake abounding with lotus flowers, holding lotus flowers or stalks in two of her hands while two elephants, each standing on a lotus flower, on either side, sprinkle her with water from upturned vessels held by their up-lifted trunks. Thus, in this motif, all her attributes are depicted at the same time; she is padmāsana, padmālayā or kamalālayā, padmakarā. Even the elephants,

Footnote 2 continued from previous page.

(d) Dhairyalakṣmī, the goddess of patience and venture; (e) Viralakṣmī, the goddess of bravery; (f) Vidyālakṣmī, the goddess of learning; (g) Santanalakṣmī, the goddess of progeny; and (h) Bhāgyalakṣmī, the goddess of fortune.

1. Coomaraswamy, A.K., 'Śrī-Lakṣmī', EA., vol.1, no.3, Jan. 1929, p. 183.



GAJALAKṢMĪ ON A LOTUS ISSUING OUT OF A JAR. (KAUSĀMBĪ).

the upturned vessels, the life-giving rain, all are combined in the same scene. The details change occasionally, but the main theme has remained unchanged even in our age.

The Gajalakṣmī motif (so named because of the presence of the elephants) is also well-known as Abhiṣekalakṣmī in accordance with its description in the Epics¹ and in the Purāṇas.² This Abhiṣekalakṣmī composition alludes to the myth of the churning of the ocean which took place in primeval times when the gods and demons made a truce and, combining their energies, extracted the elixir of immortality from the bottom of the sea. Lakṣmī was one of many items that came forth in the course of the churning. As she emerged, the Ganges and the other rivers came dancing to provide water for her ablutions and the elephants of the quarters (diggaja) consecrated her by spraying that sacred water over her.³

1. Mbh., I,18,34-6; cf: Hopkins, E.W., Ep.Myth., p.205.

2. Viṣ.P., I,9,102; Viṣdh.P., I,41,1 f. etc.; but any more accurately datable reference is yet to be found.

3. Viṣ.P., I,9,99-102; for royal abhiṣeka, cf: Harṣa, Nagānanda, V,36.

This Abhiṣeka ritual forms an essential part of the ceremony of royal consecration and is, thus, effectively equivalent to coronation or anointment. As a result of the virtue of the king, rain falls in due season.¹ Moreover, as the elephants of the quarters (diggaḥja) are also the definite symbol of royalty, the elephant symbolism is quite appropriate for consecration and for Lakṣmī who represents royal fortune (Rājalakṣmī).

Several scenes of royal abhiṣeka have been depicted in reliefs, e.g. the representation of the owl king (Uluka Jātaka) from Mathurā;² the mock coronation of Kṛṣṇa at Bādāmī in cave III;³ the coronation scene at Ajanṭā.⁴ A later Jaina manuscript also illustrates the abhiṣeka of Mahāvīra in a similar way.⁵

1. Mbh., V, 61, 17.

2. Vogel, J.Ph., 'Deux Jātakas de Mathura', BEFEO., IX, 1909.

3. Banerji, R.D., 'Bas-reliefs of Badami', MAI, XXV, pl.xxv; cf: Bauddh.Gr.S.Sūt., I, 23, 8 ff where part of the procedure of the coronation is a propitiation to Śrī-Lakṣmī with the Śrīsūkta.

4. Victor Goloubeff, 'Documents pour servir à l'étude de l'Ajanta', Ars Asiatica, X, 1927, pl.xii.

5. Khandalavala, K. and Motichandra, 'A Consideration of a MS from Maṇḍapadurga', Lalit Kalā, VI, Oct. 1959, pl. III, p.11.

Śrī-Lakṣmī herself appears in a lintel relief of Māsrur (Kāngrā district, Punjab) where the actual coronation is taking place along with the abhiṣeka ritual. The goddess is seated on a lotus in a lalitākṣepa pose, two elephants sprinkling water over her, while the flying Vidyādharas carry a huge crown above the goddess.¹

Another image of Śrī appears in the Stūpas at Sāñchī, where not only the goddess but also a Yakṣa couple stand on a padmapīṭha, the man holding a lotus in his left hand, the woman holding one in her right hand. But what is of unique interest is that one of the two padmas (usually set above the elephants) has been replaced by an umbrella, apparently suggesting the coronation of Śrī Lakṣmī.²

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1. ASIAR., 1914-15, pt.I, pl.II. Cf: Some Jaina images depict the elephants themselves crowning the image with their upraised trunks. Bhattacharya, B., Jaina Iconography, pl.VII.
 2. Marshall, J., Sāñchī, III, pl. LXXXVII, 71a. With regard to the umbrella (Chattra) a Viṣṇudharmottara purāṇa (III,62,8) passage might be cited: devyāśca mastake padmaṃ tathā karyam manoharam, where padma might be intended for a padma-chattra (lotus-umbrella). Kālidāsa also refers to Kamalachattra regarding her Rājalakṣmī aspect. (Ragh., IV,5; Kumars., VII, 89). Cf: DasGupta, Origin and Evolution of Indian Clay Sculpture, p.177, fig.95 where Lakṣmī standing on a lotus is figured under an umbrella.



GAJALAKṢMĪ IMAGE WHERE THE CORONATION IS TAKING PLACE WITH ABHIṢEKA.

An image in the bas reliefs of Bādāmi has, instead of two elephants, two men pouring over her water which is apparently brought by two elephants found on either side of her with two water vessels.¹ The image has a great deal of resemblance with the coronation scene of Kṛṣṇa except for the elephants.

Thus it may be contended that in this Gajalakṣmī composition, the coronation, or to be more precise, the abhiṣeka ritual is combined with the fertilising power of Śrī, (who as has been discussed in the previous chapter, is drenched by rain and yields abundance), both conceptions nicely united in one representation.

Gajalakṣmī on Coins

C. Das Gupta has demonstrated that this motif was the earliest device in which a female divinity (precisely Lakṣmī) can be identified; he finds a definite proof in a terracotta seal of about the third century B.C.²

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1. Banerji, R.D., MAI., XXV, Caveno II, pl.XI, e. cf: Bandh.Gr.S.Sut. (I,23,6) where hemakalaśaiḥ (golden pitchers) are essential for rājyabhiṣeka.
 2. Das Gupta, C.C., Origin and Evolution of Indian Clay Sculpture, p. 176.

In fact, ancient seals and especially coins are of great help in determining the importance of this motif in the history of the iconography of India. This was a very common type on innumerable coins. The commonest coins, the uninscribed cast copper pieces (from Kauśāmbī), ascribable on reasonable grounds to the same period as that of the punchmarked silver coins¹ (3rd century B.C.), have on the obverse the goddess standing with upraised right hand while the left hand is on the hip, elephants on either side pouring water over her. Although the coins are in a very poor condition, the Gaja-Lakṣmī scene can be detected very easily.²

That this device was quite popular even with the Indo-Scythians is evident from some coins issued by certain Śaka rulers, such as Azilese,³ ascribed to

1. Allan, J., CCAI., Introd., LXXVII.

2. Ib., pl.XX,15; the device is also seen on innumerable other coins, e.g. Ayodhyā coins of second and first centuries B.C., pl.XVI, 14,15; Ujjain Coins pl.XXXVI, 5, etc.; cf: pl.XXV,1 where an elephant's head is visible beside the central figure of the deity; certain coins of Śiva-datta, Ib., XLIII,4,5, of Mūladeva, pl.XVII,8, etc.

3. Whitehead, R.B., P M C., pl.XIII,332,333. Lakṣmī also appears on the coins of Azes, Hagamasha, but in a different style.

about the first half of the first century B.C. The Satrapal rulers, Ranjubula (40-20 B.C.)¹ and his son Soḍāsa² also used the motif on their coins. That the popularity of the motif spread beyond India is apparent from its occurrence on some coins from Ceylon.³ In later times, we find this motif depicted on the coins of Saśāṅka and of Jaya (Gupta?).⁴ And it occurs, though in a less refined form, on certain medieval northern coins, e.g. those of Jagadeva,⁵ the Kashmir kings of the 10th and 11th A.D. and so on.⁶

GAJALAKṢMĪ IN BUDDHIST SCULPTURE

That the motif was adopted by rulers irrespective of their cult and creed, is apparent from its occurrence in early Buddhist reliefs, such as those at Bhārhut,

1. Allan, J., CCAI, pl.XXVI, 12,13.

2. Allan, J., *ibid.*, pl.XXVI, 16,17.

3. Cf: Codrington, H.W., Ceylon Coins and Currency, pp. 27, 30, etc.

4. Allan, J., CGC., pl.XXIII, 14-16; XXIV, 6-9.

5. Smith, V., IMC., pl.XXVII, 17.

6. *Ibid.*, pl.XXVII, 9-13.

Bodhgayā, Sāñchī and also at Manmoḍi, Nādsur and some other western caves covering the period of the second and first centuries B.C.

At Bhārhut, we come across a few Gajalakṣmī representations. In one of these, the goddess is represented as seated on a lotus placed on a pūrnakumbha, cross-legged with folded hands. Two elephants stand on either side of the goddess sprinkling her.¹ Another depicts her in a completely different posture, standing on a lotus, pressing her left breast with her right hand.² (There are some other illustrations which represent her in the same style where only the attending elephants are lacking.) Another relief shows only the elephants with upraised trunks, but nothing remains of her figure in the middle.³

At Nādsur⁴ and Pitalkhorā,⁵ situated in the Aurangabad district of Mahārāṣṭra, there is a total absence of figure sculpture except for figures of Lakṣmī consecrated by a pair of elephants, placed over the doors or

1. Foucher, A., 'On the Iconography of the Buddha's Nativity', MAI, XLVI, pl.II, 5.

2. Ib., pl.II, 6.

3. Barua, B.M., Bharhut, fig.80a.

4. Cambridge History of India, I, pl.XXVI, 71.

5. Deshpande, M.N., The Rock-Cut Caves of Pitalkhorā, Ancient India, XV., 1959, pp. 70, 80.



* GAJALAKṢMĪ IMAGE FROM BHĀRHUT

pillars or by the pilasters. The composition is said to be "strangely bizarre and fanciful and the style is not of a high order and ... should be classed among the later efforts of the early school and cannot be much earlier than the middle of the first century B.C."¹ At the stone hedge of Bodhgayā,² reliefs that may be dated back to 100-50 B.C., show on the southern tract in jamb ten, right side, a Gajalakṣmī motif.

No completely
mixed up
reference to
Gajalakṣmī

There are a number of representations of Lakṣmī on the gates of the great stūpa of Sāñcī. These mark a decisive turn from the trend prevalent in Bhārhut, but the Lakṣmī panel and the lotus landscape panels are still dominated by the conventions of Bhārhut.³ Here we come across both the seated and the standing Gajalakṣmī figures. The eastern gate, the date of which can be ascribed to the second half of the first century B.C., has two seated Lakṣmī figures on two sides on the upper and lower architraves situated

1. Camb.Hist.of Ind., I, p.638.

2. Coomaraswamy, 'La Sculpture de Bodhgayā', Ars Asiatica, vol. XVIII, p.91, pl.XXXIX.

3. Karmrisch, S., Ind.Sculp., p. 20.

diagonally. The western gate of about the same period depicts a standing Gajalakṣmī. The interior view of the northern gate of the stūpa is also carved with a seated Gajalakṣmī figure. The southern gate contains the standing figure of Lakṣmī being consecrated by the elephants, surrounded by plants and birds.¹ (This association with birds is by no means rare in the representations of Śrī. In a very beautiful sculpture from Mathurā, where Lakṣmī is seen standing with her feet on two Kumbhas and pressing her right breast with her left hand, the background is decorated with two long-tailed peacocks.² On certain Gupta coins, a haṃsa (swan) can sometimes be recognised beside the Lakṣmī figure.³ Even during the late twelfth century A.D., a very interesting inscribed sculpture was composed at the Galpata slab where a double band of geese, two hundred in all, is seen moving from left to right. In the middle of each is a seated

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1. The Age of Imp. Unity, pl.XVIII,41; for illustrations see Foucher, MAI., XLVI, pt.III.
 2. Coomaraswamy, E A., vol. 1, fig.22.
 3. Allan, J., CGC., p.150, pl.XXIV,5. cf: Bāṇabhaṭṭa's Harṣacarita, which describes her vastra as rājahaṃsamithuna lakṣmaṇī sadrśe dukule. Agrawala, V.S., Harṣacarita, ek Saṃskṛitika adhyayana, p.200.



— LAKṢMĪ IMAGE FROM MATHURĀ —

figure of Lakṣmī, holding flowers, while a pair of elephants stands, pouring water over her from pots.)¹ At one place in the stūpas at Sāñcī,² the basic conception of the goddess is that of the classical Gajalakṣmī, in which Lakṣmī is on a lotus with folded hands while elephants stand on either side on lotuses springing from the same stem. What is remarkable here is her association with a Yakṣa couple standing between two jars. At the bottom is the representation of the lotus tree of life with two lions, two deer and the tortoise at the base. The Yakṣa couple and the tortoise possibly indicate a connection of the motif with water cosmology. The presence of the Yakṣa couple may also symbolise fertility.³ On these reliefs she sometimes has folded hands, sometimes presses her breast, whereas some represent her as holding a lotus with one hand and the other hand resting on her knee.

However, the occurrence of this motif in Buddhist surroundings has led A. Foucher to identify the goddess

1. Epigraphia Zeylanica, II, p.99, pl.XX.

2. Marshall, J., Sāñchī, III, LXXXIII, 49a.

3. JUPHS., vol.XXI, 1948, p.30.

represented, not with Śrī-Lakṣmī, the Hindu goddess, but with Māyā devī, the mother of the Buddha. He emphasises the Buddhist scripture, the Lalita Vistara, which states that at the time of the birth of the Buddha, two nāgas, Nandopananda, from the sky poured two streams of water, warm and cold, on the child.¹ Nāgas, being a well-known synonym for elephants, Foucher concludes that this scene depicts the birth of Buddha and thereby his first lustration. This composition, he thinks, makes the set of the four nativity scenes of Buddha, thus complete. He further adds that after

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1. Lalita Vistara ed. Lefmann, pt.1, p.83, lines 21-22: "nanda-upanandau ca nāgarājanau gaganatale'rdha Kāyau sthitvā Sita-usna-dve varidhāre'bhinirmittvā bodhi sattvam snāpayatah sma. And (as soon as he was born) the two nāga kings, Nanda and Upananda, standing half embodied in the sky, created two streams of water, one warm and one cold, to bathe the Bodhisattva." Cf: Foucher, A., 'On the Iconography of the Buddha's Nativity', MAI., XLVI, p.3, f.n.2. But this is an isolated instance. Other texts while mentioning the two streams of water, completely omit the performer, yadā bodhisatta mātu kucchisma nikkhamati dve udakassa dhāra antalikhā patubhvantī eka sitassa eka unhasa; When the Bodhisattva comes out of his mother's womb, two streams of water are poured from the sky, one hot and one cold. Cf: Jātakavannanā, Ed. Fausboll, vol.V, I, p.53, lines 6-7. For other references see Foucher, A., 'On the Iconography of Buddha's Nativity', MAI., XLVI, 1936, p.21.

the third century A.D., this motif disappeared from Buddhist and Jain art, and from then on invariably represented the Hindu goddess Śrī or Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth and abundance.¹

This interpretation is not quite convincing. One difficulty with Foucher's theory is the dating of the Lalita Vistara in the early Christian era, much later than the Sāñcī and Bhārhut representations, while there is ample material in early Hindu literature to prove the existence of the Śrī Lakṣmī cult in the pre-Buddhist period² and even to explain the significance of the symbolism of the abhiṣeka formula.³ Moreover, in this composition, the symbolism of the goddess, that is, her being placed on a padmapīṭha, surrounded by lotus flowers, holding lotus blossoms in her hand, is preserved unaltered and is not warranted by the legend of the birth of the Buddha. In fact, the iconography rather contradicts the legendary descriptions of

1. Foucher, A., 'On the Iconography of Buddha's Nativity', MAI., XLVI, p.21.

2. Cf: S.Br., XI,4,3,1 ff; Srī Sūkta.

3. Cf: The Chapter on the Srīsūkta.

the scene, which should be represented in the mangogrove with Māyā standing under a plakṣa tree, and not amongst the lotuses.¹

Besides, some of the reliefs that reproduce the scene of the first bath of the Buddha also minimise the possibility of the view held by Foucher that the elephants are depicted here as a synonym for nāga which originally meant serpents. In one of them from Sārnāth, all the three events, i.e. Māyā's dream of conception, birth of the Buddha and his lustration are illustrated and in the last motif, the nāgas are logically placed; they float in the air just above the infant whom they bathe and in addition to their many headed capello, they each have a serpent's tail.² A painted wooden cover of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā has the lustration of the Buddha standing on the lotuses while a male from above pours water over him. He is shown as half bodied³ in

1. Plakṣavrkṣamupajagāma; plakṣaśākhām grhitvā; Lalita Vistara, p.83. For illustrations, cf: Longhurst, A.H., MAI., LIV, pl.XX,b. which illustrates the scene of nativity and seven steps; also pl.XXVIII,b.; Banerji, R.D., EISMS., pl.XXV,a.

2. ASIAR., 1906-07, p.96, pl.XXVIII, 5.

3. Now in the private collection of Prof. S.K. Saraswati.



THE THREE EVENTS OF BUDDHA'S LIFE FROM A STONE RELIEF, SĀRNĀTH



BUDDHA'S LUSTRATION (AṢṬASĀHASRIKĀ PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ)

keeping with the Lalita Vistara description 'ardhakāyau'. In a Gandhāra relief from Peshawar, we find Indra (with his vajra) and Brahmā as bathing the infant Buddha,¹ conforming to another description of the Lalita Vistara.² But even the Gandhāra school was not entirely content with the Indra-Brahmā motif and recognised the Nando-pananda incident by exhibiting them in their serpentine form, performing the lustre in their coils.³ "It is believed," says H. Hargreaves, "that it was only malefic nāgas such as the black snakes of Rājagṛha or that in the Kasyapa's school which in this school, were represented in animal form."⁴ Hiuen Tsāng's account of this event is even more illuminating as he says: "Moreover two dragons sprang forth, and fixed in the air, poured down the one a cold, and the other a warm water stream from his mouth to wash the prince."⁵ Lastly, it is to

1. Grünwedell, A., Budh. Art in India, p.140, fig.92. Some more reliefs of similar nature have been depicted in Gandhāra art. Foucher, AGBG., I, p.301, fig.152. Also cf: Ingholt, Harold, Gandharan Art in Pakistan, p.103.

2. Lalita Vistara, p.84, lines 1-2.

3. Hargreaves, H., 'Three unidentified Graeco-Buddhist Reliefs', ASIAR., 1924-25, p.152, pl.XXXIX,e.

4. *Ib.*, p.152.

5. Beal, S., Buddhist Records, II, p.24.



BIRTH OF BUDDHA FROM AJANTĀ

be noted that the use of the word nāga to convey the sense of an elephant is rather late and Nandopananda (explicitly described in the Buddhist literature as the Kings [i.e. Nanda and Upananda] of the nāgas who had their abodes in the Pātāla region)¹ is, in another legend, a particular nāga king who coiled round Sineru to refrain the Buddha from reaching his destination, but was defeated and became an adherent follower of the Buddha.²

Thus, all the emphasis is on its serpentine form and neither the sculptor nor the artist was inclined to follow the Lalita Vistara description, the way it has been interpreted by Foucher. Even in Java, where the whole Buddhist art is based on the literary excellence of the Lalita Vistara,³ no such motif occurs. Thus there is very little possibility in recognising an elephant symbolism in the term nāga and it is hardly believable that all these images were executed, being based on a solitary evidence of the Lalita Vistara. Even less comprehensible is how could it have such a wide distribution

1. Divyāvadāna, Ed. Cowell & Neill, p.395.

2. Thag.A., I, 188f., Jātaka, Ed. V. Fausbøll, V, p.126.

3. Cf: Kron, N.J., The Life of Buddha on the Stupa of Borobudur According to the Lalita Vistara text.

when the origin exists in the misinterpretation of a term, a rather unlikely event in an iconographic sphere.

Moreover, Śrī-Lakṣmī was a popular figure with the Buddhists as is apparent from the occurrence of her name in the Milinda Pañhu¹ where she has a cult of her own. The figure of Sirimādevatā (the goddess mother Śrī) where she is represented without her attributes or environment, but only holds in her upraised right hand a lotus bud, also suggests Lakṣmī's inclusion within the Buddhist pantheon. That Siri is none but Lakṣmī is evident from the Sirikālakanni Jātaka where she says 'I am Siri (beauty). I am Lakkhi (fortune).'² In the Maitribala Jātaka³ we find her in the usual association with the lotus: 'Śrī disdaining the lotus pond (her natural home) loves to reside with you.' The Dhammapada Attakathā⁴ refers to her as 'rājja siridāyikā devatā' the deity of royal fortune. In some Buddhist texts, she is described as Devakumārikā

1. Milinda Pañhu, IV, 4, 6.

2. Sirikālakanni Jātaka, III, 382, 257-64.

3. Jātakamālā, VIII, Verse 49.

4. Dhammapada Attakathā, II, 17.

and is associated with the northern and southern quarters.¹

In this context, we may refer to some icons which also admit of her inclusion within the Buddhist pantheon. A peculiar Gajalakṣmī image was found along with Hārītī in a Buddhist vihāra in Kauśāmbī, and can be dated back to the first century A.D. It is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet in height, possibly the largest image of Lakṣmī found in this area, and was established in a temple which was inside a Buddhist vihāra and this suggests that her worship was in vogue in that period along with Hārītī amongst the Buddhists. It also supports the Milinda Pañha evidence that Śrī had a cult of her own. In this image, she holds a lotus with one hand, the other hand being in Abhaya Mudrā. But what is peculiar is that two elephants stand right on her crown and sprinkle water on her person.² Another image from the Vihāra of Bhājā depicts Śrī-Lakṣmī in the midst of four upāsakas.³ (Could they be identified with

1. Cf: Barua and Sinha, Bharhut Inscriptions, p.274.

2. Govindachandra, 'The Parure of the Buddhist goddesses of Kauśāmbī', Mañjarī, May, 1956, p.19, pl.II.

3. Coomaraswamy, HIIA., p.29.



A TERRACOTTA GAJALAKṢMĪ IMAGE FROM KAUSĀMBĪ

the four ṛsis mentioned in the Śrīsūkta?) But the conclusive evidence is supplied by a votive tablet, a Buddhist one, which exhibits a Lakṣmī mūrti; a stūpa and a six petalled flower are also shown beside the central image of the goddess.¹

GAJALAKṢMĪ AS A YAKṢINĪ

The other figures that occur in these Sāñchī reliefs are mostly Yakṣas and Yakṣiṇīs and the iconographic types of the Yakṣiṇīs and Devatās seem to have had a great role in determining the early types of Śrī-Lakṣmī. This finds expression in a reverse order in the Matsya Purāṇa² which states after a description of the Lakṣmī image, that the image of a Yakṣiṇī should be made similarly and be placed close to Lakṣmī Devī. Coomaraswamy classifies Lakṣmī as belonging to the Yakṣiṇī class and identifies some female figures with

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1. Smith, 'The Buddhist Monastery at Sohnāg in the Gorakhpur district', JRAS., 1900, p.433, pl.V. In Sahri Bahlol (Peshawar), where some Buddhist Vihāras have been converted into Hindu temples, amidst the fragments of small divine figures, one is manifestly a Lakṣmī image. ASIAR., 1911-12, pp. 116-17.
 2. Mat.Pur., CCLXI, 40-47.

Lakṣmī in her Yakṣī aspect.¹ A relief, found in a medallion in Sāñcī, shows a female figure on a lotus, a lotus in her hand and an attendant bringing food and drink.² This figure recalls the Śrī (bringing food and drink) of the Taittirīya Upaniṣad³ and may be said to be the Śrī-Yakṣī concept since Yakṣas are often associated with the bearing of food. There are several other images where the lady herself carries food and drink and so may be said to be the figure of Śrī or rather of a Yakṣiṇī, the attendant.⁴ In a sculpture (of about the beginning of the second century A.D.) from Amarāvati, a floral garland, which is usually supported by Yakṣas, is held by a female, sitting on the raised pericarp of a lotus and leaning backward to exert considerable force in pulling out the garland from the mouth of the makara. Above it there are numerous lotus sprays designating a watery environment, and hence

1. Coomaraswamy, E A., vol.I, p.182.

2. Ib., fig.16.

3. Taitt.Up., I,4 where Śrī is asked to bring garments, cows, food and drink.

4. Coomaraswamy, EA., vol.1, fig.28; fig.B; O.C. Ganguly, 'A Kuṣāṇa caryatide from Mathurā', Rūpam, XXXI, 1927, pp. 73-74.

the figure has been identified as the Yakṣiṇī concept of Śrī.¹

Even in later times, on certain Gupta seals from Basārḥ and Bhiṭā, the goddess is found in association with the Yakṣas. She is attended by dwarf Yakṣas standing beside jars of money or pouring out a stream of wealth from similar jars held in their hands, thereby emphasising her wealth-giving aspect.²

On one of the Gupta seals of the Kumārāmātyā-dhikarāṇa from Basārḥ,³ Lakṣmī stands in a grove of trees with elephants pouring water over her; beside her there are two dwarfish figures holding objects like money bags. On some seals she holds a six-petalled lotus.⁴ Another seal belonging to the Śrī-yuvarāja bhaṭṭāraka-pādīya-kumārāmātyādhikarāṇa has the Gajalakṣmī

1. Banerjea, DHI., p.374, pl.VIII, fig.6.

2. For references, cf: EA., vol.I, p.185. Here we may refer to some Gupta coins (Allan, CGC., pl.XIV,10,11) and seals (ASIAR., 1911-12, pl.XIX, 35; Handbook to the centenary exhibition, Archaeological Survey of India, Dec. 1961, pl.XIV, 9) where the goddess herself is depicted as showering coins.

3. Bloch, T., 'Excavations at Basārḥ', ASIAR., 1903-04, p.107, seal no.4.

4. Ib., No.5.

motif with the male figures kneeling on either side throwing coins from the bags.¹ Thus she appears on many other official seals² invariably accompanied by Yakṣas on either side pouring out money from their purses.

On one Bhiṭā seal, Lakṣmī is depicted as padmahastā, while two yakṣas on either side sit with folded hands on a lotus.³

Some other seals which bear explicit marks of her association with Viṣṇu still retain some traces of her connection with Kubera, the King of the Yakṣas.⁴ There are no yakṣas on these seals, but the money bags on both sides pour out coins themselves.⁵ In fact, being the goddess of wealth, this association of Lakṣmī with the Yakṣas is quite understandable. There is ample material in literature as well as in iconography to

1. Ib., No.6.

2. Ib., pp. 107-9.

3. Ib., No.35. In this context we may refer to an early Gajalakṣmī representation carved on a torana, recovered from Kauśamti. The torana, which possibly belonged to a temple, shows, in addition to a large elephant and bull and a makara, a Yakṣa figure sculpted along with the Gajalakṣmī motif. Cf: Kala, S.C., Sculptures in the Allahabad Museum, pl.XVla.

4. Cf: Lakṣmī and Kubera in the Chapter on the Śrīsūkta.

5. ASIAR., pl.XIX, 42.

indicate such a connection.¹ Even in Japanese mythology, Kudoko = Kichijoto = Lakṣmī = Śrī is the daughter of Hārītī, wife of Vaiśravaṇa Kubera,² which shows that in developed mythology, Śrī, as the goddess of wealth, took the position of Kubera's daughter. This also reminds one of her association with Nala-Kubera, son of Kubera, in the Mahābhārata.³

GAJALAKṢMĪ IN JAINISM

Worship of Śrī-Lakṣmī occupies an important place also amongst the Jainas. In the Kalpasūtra,⁴ when the embryo of Mahāvīra has already passed from the womb of Brahmāṇī Devanandā to that of Kṣatīyāni Triśalā, the abhiseya of Siri was one of her fourteen auspicious dreams, foretelling the birth of Mahāvīra. There is a detailed description, probably the oldest extant Jain

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1. Banerjea, J.N., DHI., p.347, pl.VII, fig.6.
 2. EA., Vol.1, p.175; cf: at other places she is equated with Hārītī.
 3. 'Sadā bhagavatī ca Śrīstathaiva nalakubarah', Mbh., II,10,19; This also reminds one of Rambhā as Nalakubera's wife who was ravished by Ravana. Cf: Mbh., III,280,60.
 4. Paryuṣaṇa-Kalpa, 36.

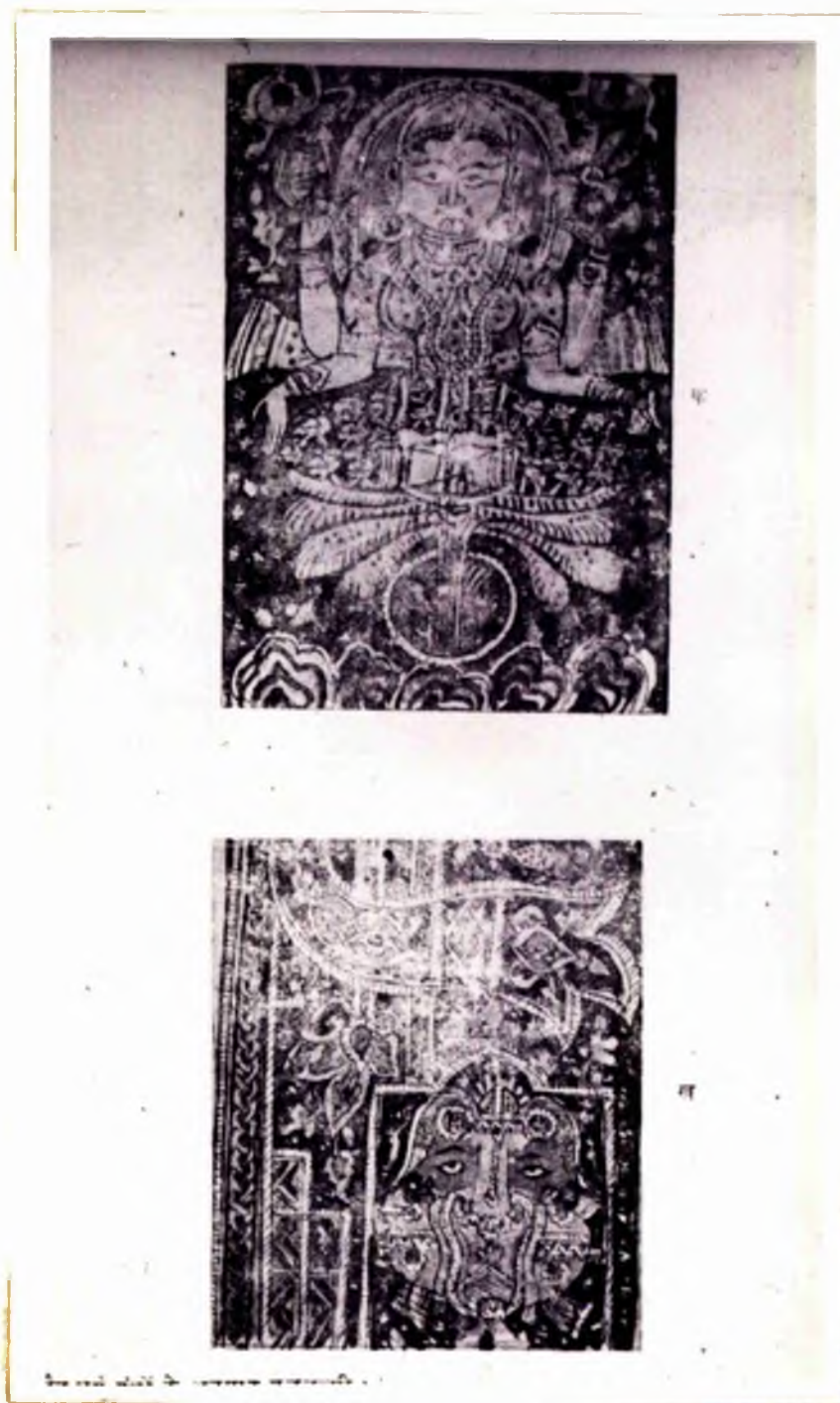
identification of Gajalakṣmī, beginning with padma-ddaha kamalavāsīnīm sirim-bhaga-vaim-picchai-himavanta-sela-sihare-disā-ga indoru pīyara karabhi siccamānim, "Goddess of famous beauty, Siri, on the top of mount Himavant, reposing on a lotus in the lotus lake, anointed with water from the strong and large trunks of the guardian elephants"¹, etc., and then a long description of her physical charms. But the mention of a garland made of dīnāras (Latin 'denarius') has led some to ascribe this part of the composition to a later date.² (In the Bhagavatisūtra, the same dream, as one of the dreams of Dhārīpī, is designated simply as abhiseya.³) A Gajalakṣmī image ascribable to about the 1st century B.C., in keeping with the Jaina story of Trisalā, has been found on the doorway of the Jain cave of Ananta Gumphā.⁴

1. SBE., XXII, p.132.

2. Ib., p.233, n.

3. Barnett, Antagada dasāo, p.24. Cf.: Gajalakṣmī motif in the Jain Manuscript Upadeśamālā (Shah, U.P., Studies in Jaina Art, pl.XXVI, 70) where she holds amrtaghāṭa and rosary in two of her hands and two other hands hold lotuses. The Jains believe the Pūrpakalaśa 'Punnakalasa' just to be another representation of Sri and to emphasise an impression of an image, draws two eyes on it. Coomaraswamy, 'The conquerors life in Jaina Painting', JISOA., Vol.III, no.2, 1935, p.136. Lakṣmī's relation with the Jains is well attested by an inscription, cf: ASIAR, 1905-06, p.121

4. Camb.Hist.of Ind., p.640, pl.XXVII, 75.



GAJALAKṢMĪ AND THE PAINTED PŪRṆAGHĀṬA (A JAINA MS.)

GAJALAKṢMĪ IN BUDDHISM : CONCLUSIONS

From these descriptions it is rather unlikely that the early Gajalakṣmī composition was originally a representation of Māyā devī; for in that case, it would have remained so in the Jain Scriptures, instead of being mentioned as Śrī, as it is.

Apart from that, the question remains as to how the Mahābhārata could have painted the birth scene of its popular Brahmanic deity in a way that actually represented the mother of the Buddha! The Mahābhārata has only described the scene but in the Rāmāyaṇa,¹ the Puṣpaka ratha is engraved with the Lakṣmī figure on a lotus with a lotus in her hand, attended by elephants, which pre-supposes its antiquity. Although possible, it is rather unlikely that these two great epics would borrow a contemporary Buddhist composition to represent the icon of the consort of their supreme god Nārāyaṇa.

In addition, it would seem rather strange that a Buddhist composition should have been absorbed into the

1. Rām., V, 7, 14, : niyuṣṭyamānāśca gajāḥ suhastāḥ
sakeśaraścaḍpalapatrahastāḥ / babhuva devica
kṛtasuhastā lakṣmistathā padmīni padmahastā.

Hindu pantheon simultaneously vanishing from its own sect. How could the figure become solely Hindu despite its being originally a Buddhist one?

Thus Zimmer writes that Foucher's interpretation can only be accepted with the understanding that in this case, for some reason or other, the craftsmen did not take the trouble to alter in any way the details of the Hindu formula in order to relate it to a Buddhist legend. A contemporary looking upon it would have been reminded not of the nativity of the Buddha but of Śrī-Lakṣmī, particularly when the whole Stūpa is alive with the figures of other popular divinities representing the vital forces of the earth, Yakṣas, Nāgas and Vṛkṣadevatās. There is certainly no necessity (hardly any possibility) to read into the figure of the Lotus goddess, a new Buddhist formula.¹

Moreover, if a nativity formula had been represented in early Indian art, it would probably have survived at Amarāvati where every one of the old aniconic formulae persists side by side with the representation of the Buddha in ideal human forms. But it is conspicuously

1. Zimmer, H., AIA., p.187.

absent at Amarāvātī and also in the related early Buddhist art of Ceylon.¹

Due to these considerations, there seems to be no real basis for this identification with Māyā-Devī. Moreover, no other nativity symbol can be recognised in this scene, and the conception of Buddha is better represented by Māyā's dream of the white elephant which appears elsewhere at Bhārhut, making the set of four miracles thus complete.²

J. Marshall, in his monumental work on Sāñcī³ reconciles the differences by stating that

"Some of the Māyā figures on gateways and balustrades are identical with the familiar type of Śrī Lakṣmī standing or

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1. Coomaraswamy, EA., vol.1, p.187. Furthermore, it is to be noted that the particular motif was not sculpted only in a Buddhist surrounding at that time, but also in association with other Hindu divinities. One such representation is found on a beautiful red sandstone pillar with an inscription which can be dated back to the first century B.C. The upper section has an image of Sūrya along with three females (possibly his three wives) and the lower division contains a Gajalakṣmī figure. Vats, Madho Sarup., 'Lala Bhagat', ASIAR., 1929-30, pp. 132-133, pl.XXXI,g.
 2. Coomaraswamy, EA., vol.1, p.187.
 3. Marshall, J., Sāñchī, p.96, f.n.1.



MĀYĀ DEVĪ'S DREAM OF CONCEPTION

(BHĀRHUT)

seated on a lotus,¹ which the Buddhists evidently appropriated, along with so many other formulae and motifs, from the current art of the period, since it can hardly be doubted that the Srī Lakṣmī type goes back to a more remote age than Buddhism."

According to Chintamani Kar, it is "the figure of Srī or Lakṣmī, the pre-Buddhist mother Goddess (which was later adopted to assume the role of Māyā devī) which is represented on the architraves."² He further adds that

"though it is predominantly Buddhist, Mauryan art is influenced by old Brāhmanical and west Asian motifs. Images connected with nature worship were very common in the period. The cult of the Mother Goddess existed even before the Vedas; it is the giver of fertility and fortune that is represented by the Brāhmanical image of Lakṣmī or Srī or Sirimā devatā." 3

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1. It is interesting to note in this connection that in Sāñchī, some female figures are depicted in exactly the same manner as those of the Gajalakṣmī images except for the elephants and thus resemble the padmāsana (MASī, XLV, pl.III,11) and Kamala vāsini (Ib., 7, infrapp.232-233) Lakṣmī-mūrtis. If the Gajalakṣmī image is originally a Māyā figure because of the attending elephants, how could we account for these figures?
 2. Kar. Chintamani, Classical Indian Sculpture, p.3.
 3. Ib., p.5.

LATER DEVELOPMENT OF THE GAJALAKṢMĪ IMAGE

During the Gupta age, Śrī-Lakṣmī attained her full-fledged form. Though she then became primarily associated with Viṣṇu, individual figures of Śrī-Lakṣmī are not very rare. Several Gupta seals bear the Gajalakṣmī figure, some with Yakṣas, as has already been mentioned.¹

With the passage of time, the motif became more and more refined but with various changes. Thus, during the seventh century A.D., a beautiful specimen of the Gajalakṣmī composition was produced by the Pallava artists at Mahābalipuram (Māmallapuram) in the Varāha cave.² Here the goddess, instead of being surrounded by lotuses, is flanked by four female attendants, two on the immediate right and left lifting up pots received by two majestic elephants and poured over the goddess. The second attendant to the left holds a conch and the corresponding one on the right holds a cup-like vessel

1. Supra, pp.175-76.

2. Rao, T.A.G., EHI., vol.II, pl.CIX.

which, according to Sivaramamurti was "possibly meant to hold sandal paste, turmeric powder or some toilet requisite intended for the Goddess".¹ The elephants are not represented in full, possibly in order to make it symmetrical. The central figure of the goddess seems to hold lotus flowers in two of her hands.

C. Sivaramamurti finds in this sculpture a perfect reproduction of Sāmānyā Lakṣmī mentioned in the Mānasāra where the goddess is to have two hands and two eyes, holding red lotuses, and adorned with various jewels, two elephants performing the lustre over her,

sāmānyām lakṣmīm kuryād dvibhujām ca dvinetrakām
raktapadmodhṛtau hastau sarvābharanabhūṣiṇīm
 ... airāvataadvayam caiva kuryādāradhayetsudhiḥ.²

The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa states that the Lakṣmī mūrti, when it is not with Viṣṇu, should have four hands, be seated in the same posture as Vināyaka on a full-blown lotus of eight petals, and should hold in the right hand a stalk that reaches her shoulder, and in the

1. Sivaramamurti, C., South Indian Images, pp. 188-89.

2. Acharya, P.K., Mānasāra on Architecture and Sculpture, p.357, 30-31. Cf: Some Gajalakṣmī representations on the bas-reliefs of Bādāmi where the two hands of Lakṣmī either rest on her knees or carry a bilva and a lotus. MASI., XXV, pl.X,c; V,a.

left a pitcher of amṛta; two other hands should hold the śaṅkha (first time mentioned in connection with Lakṣmī) and bilva, while two elephants behind her should pour water over her. The text also adds that these two elephants are actually two nidhis, Śaṅkha and Padma, of which Lakṣmī is the presiding deity, 'hastidvayam vijāniḥī śaṅkha padmā-vubhau nidhi'.¹

Here, we may refer to a Gajalakṣmī image at Ellora in the Kailāsanātha temple, which is mentioned by a Rāṣṭrakūṭa inscription as Jalakrīḍā.² The goddess bathed by elephants is seated on a lotus in the lotus pond; all four hands are broken off. The first thing that attracts the attention is the presence of two large nāgas under the lotus seat, holding two full vessels

1. Viśdh.P., III, 82, 10; There is a full account in the Mārk.P. (Ch. LXVIII) of the aṣṭanidhis of which Lakṣmī is the presiding deity and in this context, a Gajalakṣmī image may be mentioned where śaṅkha and padma are depicted in their personified forms on either side of Lakṣmī. Sharma, B.N., 'Unpublished Pāla and Sena Sculptures in the National Museum, New Delhi', East and West, XIX, Nos. 3-4, Sep.-Dec., 1969, fig. 1. That śaṅkha and padma were considered to be auspicious and so were placed at the doorsteps finds an echo in Kālidāsa, dvaropānte likhitavapuṣau śaṅkha padmau. Megh., ii, 20.

2. Coomaraswamy, EA., vol. 1, p. 182.

while another one seems to support the lotus on which the goddess rests her feet. There is a conch shell among the lotuses under the seat, indicating her association with water and aquatic objects. Two four-armed male attendants stand beside her, one holding a ghaṭa, and the other one a bilva fruit.¹ (Although the hands are broken, the required objects, viz. śankha, bilva, ghaṭa, etc. can still be found in the surrounding.)

Another illustration on the sides of the Daśāvatāra cave shows four elephants, two performing the lustre while two others beneath them seem to be playing with jars or waiting for their turn to sprinkle the goddess.² The Tantrasāra³ describes the goddess being bathed by four elephants, rivalling the lustre of molten gold, holding two lotuses in two hands while the other two make the gestures of abhaya and varada.

An image from Indore, represented in Moor's Hindu Pantheon, plate 30, can be identified as a four-armed

1. Rao, EHI., vol.I, pl.CX; Banerjea, DHI., p.375.

2. Burgess, 'Elura Cave Temple', ASWI, vol.V, 1883, pl.XLII.

3. Avalon, A., Hymns to the Goddess, pp. 33-34.



GAJALAKṢMĪ IMAGE WITH FOUR ELEPHANTS (ELLORĀ)

image of Lakṣmī with elephant attendants; her two upper hands hold two lotus flowers while the lower two are in varada mudrā. Two servants wave caurīs, which seem to follow the Śilpaśāstra description 'cāmarair vijyamānām ca ... bhringārasalilotkaraiḥ'.

A beautiful specimen from Khiching (Mayurbhanj) shows the goddess inside a decorated square, sitting in a lalitākṣepa pose on a Viśvapadma, with her right hand in the varada-mudrā, her left hand holding a lotus flower while two elephants standing on two respective lotus flowers anoint her with water.¹

A relief near the doorway of temple No. 9 at Aihole² illustrates an image of unique interest. On the lintel there is a normal abhiṣeka scene, but at the base of each jamb is a full vessel with a seated Yakṣa on one side, and on the other an elephant grasping the protruding lotus foliage with its trunk. This association with the Yakṣas recalls another image which shows a Gajalakṣmī image beside Kubera, the King of the Yakṣas.³

In the ruins of the Chedi country belonging to the

1. Banerjea, DHI., pl.XVIII, fig.2.

2. Cousens, H., Calukyan Architecture, pl.XIV.

3. Barrett, Douglas, 'Hemavāṭī', The Heritage of Indian Art, II, 1958, pl.XX.

tenth century A.D. has been found a Gajalakṣmī figure where the goddess with her four hands holds two lotuses in two of her hands, one holding the conch and one in abhaya pose.¹

An interesting image in the collection of the Baṅgīya Sāhitya pariṣad² has four hands, holding a rosary and an arrow (or club?) in her right hands and a lotus with stalk and a book (this recalls her brahmaśrī aspect) in the left ones, being seated on a lotus and bathed by two elephants standing on her either side. Beside the book, a varāha on the lotus where her right foot rests, is noticeable. Some of these attributes are to be found in the description given in the Brhat Samhitā:

Kāryā caturbhujā yā vāmakarābhyām sapustakam kamalam
dvābhyām dakṣiṇe pārśve varam arthiṣvakṣasūtrāṇca
vāmeṣvastabhujāyāḥ kaṇḍalum cāpaṃ ambujam śāstram
varāśara darpaṇa yuktāḥ savya bhujāḥ śakṣasūtrāśca.³

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1. Banerji, R.D., 'The Haihayas of Tripuri and their monuments', MAI., XXIII, p.53.
 2. Found in the Bogra district, Banerjee, EISMS., pl. LXII, a. This book is possibly a later development with the understanding that wisdom is a requirement to acquire Lakṣmī (riches), as is reflected in the Buddhist literature where Śrī is both punṇā and prajñā, (siri pi puṇṇāṃ pi pañṇāṃ pi, Jāt., vol. IV, pp. 281-82) and she is also called bhūrī pañṇā. Ib., vol. III, p.262.
 3. Br. Samh., LVIII, 38-39.

Here we can refer to another four handed Gajalakṣmī figure which is sculpted on the door frame of the Siddha Vināyaka temple, holding a pomegranate, a book and a lotus flower in three hands, the fourth one being in the varada mudrā.¹

C. Sivaramamurti² and, following him, Banerjea³ have called attention to one bronze and two stone sculptures, all in the collection of the Madras Museum. The stone ones are from Kāverīpakkam (N. Arcot district, Madras) and the bronze was unearthed from the village of Enadi (Arantangi Taluq, Tanjore district, Madras). As these scholars have pointed out, the first⁴ of the two stone figures and the bronze⁵ are really the symbol-cum-image of Śrī-Lakṣmī, as the outline of the auspicious symbol called Śrīvatsa can be distinctly recognised in them; the curled ends of the symbol simulate the arms and legs of Lakṣmī in both figures, and in the first

1. Kalekar, Narayana Dattatreya, 'Kashī kī prācīna devamūrtiyā 'Śrī Lakṣmī'', Aaj., 26th Oct., 1957, p.5, col.3.

2. Sivaramamurti, C., 'Goddess Lakṣmī and her Symbols', JUPHS., XIV, part 1, July 1941, pp. 21-24.

3. Banerjea, DHI., p.376.

4. Ib., pl.XIX, 1.

5. Ib., 3.

figure, the bathing elephants, the lighted lamps, the Śaṅkha and Padma nidhis can be faintly recognised. If the third figure¹ is compared with these two, it is fascinating to see how the symbol-cum-image might have developed into a fully-fledged image of Gajalakṣmī, with her hands holding Śaṅkha and Padma. These three sculptures, belonging to the early medieval period, demonstrate in a most interesting way how close the relation was between the aniconic symbol and the icon itself, and how, at least in this case, the latter might have evolved from the former.²

Lastly, it would suffice by stating that in many temples, of Orissa in particular, this Gajalakṣmī motif is carved in the centre of the architrave over the doorway of the principal structure, whatever might have been the cult affiliation of the shrines.³ (Hence

1. Banerjea, DHI., pl.XIX,2.

2. Ib., p.376.

3. Ib., p.375. Cf: Gajalakṣmī on a Sūrya temple, Bhandarkar, D.R., 'The temple of Narasimhanātha', ASIAR., 1904-05, pp. 121-22 also p.123; ASIAR., 1922-23, p.43; Fergusson and Burgess, Cave Temples of India, p.71, pl.1; Burgess, 'Elura Cave Temples', ASWI., V, pl.XXV,1, etc.; it was also used on the seals of the somavaṃśis, although they were Śaivas like that of the Sārabhapuriyas and the Kalacuris. Imperial Kannuj, p.145.



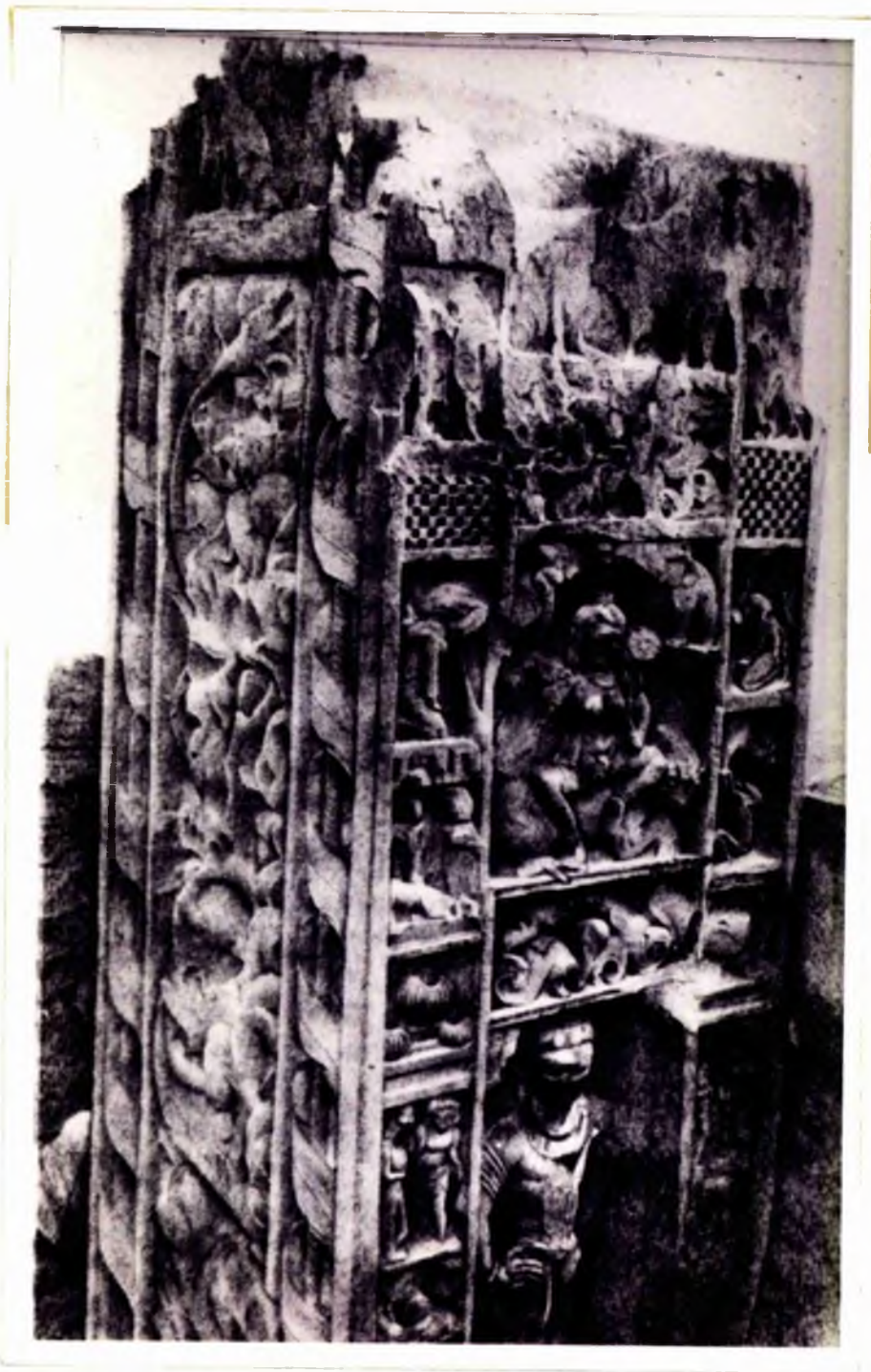
ŚRĪVATSA AND ŚRĪ

the principal doorway of Orissan temples is known as Lakṣmīdvāra.) On certain dedicatory blocks, Gaṇeśa is depicted above the door. This does not, of course, imply that the shrine is built for Śaiva worship any more than Gajalakṣmī over the door lintels indicates Vaiṣṇava worship. Both are used as favourite deities in the north and south respectively, even the Jainas having used Gajalakṣmī upon the outer doors of their temples. It is doubtful though, whether Gaṇeśa would have ever surmounted a Vaiṣṇava temple.

AFFINITIES WITH DURGĀ

A remarkable representation of the Gajalakṣmī motif was found on a pillar of Bilsād, which can be dated 415-16 A.D. The usual motif is reproduced here i.e. a pair of elephants performing the lustre over the central figure of the goddess of fortune - but the feature which is of unique interest is that the goddess is seated on the back of a lion,¹ thus recalling the image of Siṃhavāhinī Durgā. To this might be added

1. Cunningham, ASIR., vol.XI, pl.VI.



SIṂHAVĀHINĪ GAJALAKṢMĪ FROM BILSĀP

another reproduction from Kashmir, now in the collection of the British Museum and still unnoticed by scholars. It shows a female figure sitting on the back of a lion, holding a lotus with upraised right hand, left hand rests on her knee, two kneeling figures are depicted on her either side. Because parts of the image are broken, only two upturned vessels pouring lustre over her are noticeable and thus supplies us with another Gajalakṣmī motif with a lion vāhana.¹

These unusual representations may be explained by the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa² which states that Lakṣmī should have the siṃhāsana as her seat,

śuklāmvarā devī rūpeṇa pratimā bhuvi
prthak caturbhuja kār्या devī siṃhāsane śubhe
āvarjita ghaṭam kār्याṃ tatprsthe kuṅjaradvayam

The fifth adhyāya of the Rūpamaṇḍana gives a similar description, viz.

astapatrāmbujasyordhve lakṣmī siṃhāsane śubhe
vināyakavadāsīnā sarvābharāṇa bhūṣitā

although it does not mention the presence of the elephants.

Here the word Siṃhāsana could have meant simply the

1. British Mus., Brooke Sewell Fund, 1966, 10-12, 3.

2. Viṣṇu.P., III, 82, 3&7.



SIMHAVĀHINĪ ABHISEKA-LAKṢMĪ (BRITISH MUSEUM)

throne although it is rather unlikely in an iconographic injunction. But as the lion has been found to constitute the seat of the goddess in this image, which answers to the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa description quite reasonably, there is no reason why it should not be taken in its original literal sense.

To corroborate this hypothesis, we can cite the MatsyaPurāṇa verse which evidently attaches the lion to the lotus seat of the goddess when it says:

padmāsanopaviṣṭā tu padmasiṃhāsanasthitā
karibhyām snāpyamānā'sau bhrṅgārābhyām anekaśab
prakṣālayantau karīṇau bhrṅgārābhyām tathā'parau¹

D. Shukla thinks that this Bilsad image represents Saivī Lakṣmī who is completely different from her Vaiṣṇavī aspect.² It can rather be said that in this image there is a fusion of the two eminent Saktis, Lakṣmī and Durgā. And as this example proves, there seems to have been no rigid rule for identifying a female figure with Durgā just because of the presence of a lion's head beside her.³ (One such controversial figure

1. Mat.P., CCLXI, 46.

2. Shukla, D.,
p. 311.

Canons Of

Hindu/Iconography and Painting,

3. Whitehead, R.B., PMC., pl.XII, 308.

appears on Azes's coins, a standing female figure with a lotus in one hand and the other on her hip.)

This unique representation also solves certain other problems with regard to the identification of a few female figures occurring on the reverse of some Gupta coins. The standard type coins of Samudra Gupta, supposed to be the earliest of the Gupta coins, have on the reverse a female figure, sitting on a throne, with a cornucopia and a noose in her hands.¹ She has quite reasonably been identified with Śrī-Lakṣmī, consort of Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa of the parama bhāgavata Guptas. "In fact, [Lakṣmī] became the symbol of the vast wealth amassed by the people of the Gupta period."²

The same type of female figure appears on the reverse of the Candragupta-Kumāradevī coins. There the goddess holds similar objects in her hands, but a lion seems to constitute her seat,³ thereby inspiring the controversy as to whether it represents Durgā or Lakṣmī. Allan tries to compromise by stating it to be

1. Allan, J., CGC., pl.I; II, 1-5.

2. Cf: Allan, CGC., Introd., p.lxxiii.

3. Ib., pl.III, 1-15.



LAKṢMĪ ON A CANDRA GUPTA - KUMĀRADEVĪ COIN

a Lakṣmī-Ambikā (another name for Durgā) image.¹

This view does not appear unreasonable in view of the fact that the deity still holds the cornucopia, an attribute of the goddess of fortune, while she sits upon the lion of Durgā.

This cornucopia seems to be an Indian modification of the Graeco-Roman cornucopia or horn of plenty, from which exudes all the produce of the earth which makes for the sustenance and welfare of people.

Cornucopia, a horn filled with fruits and flowers, is the symbol of peace and prosperity, disposer of riches, provider of increase. The idea possibly originated in the practice of using the horns of oxen and goats as drinking cups, hence the rhyton (drinking horn) is often confounded with cornucopia.²

The Greek mythology, which alludes to this myth, varies. One version says that Amalthea (the name is sometimes given to a nymph), daughter of the Cretan king Melisseus, rears up Zeus, on the milk of a goat and

1. Allan, J., CGC., Introd. p.xci.

2. Derenberg and Saglio's 'Dictionnaire des Antiquités', Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed., vol.VII, p.179.

her sister Melissa offers him honey. Then Zeus, out of gratitude, gave her the horn of the goat with the promise that she shall always find in it whatever she wishes.¹ Elsewhere, Amalthea herself is the goat (and Melissa is a bee) and after her death, Zeus honoured her by making one of her horns a wonder, whoever had it, might immediately have anything he wished to drink or eat.² This accounts for the attachment of the cornucopia to the goddesses of fortune, as, like them, it yields abundance whenever asked. Thus it is found in the hands of Fortuna on Roman coins,³ of Tyche on Greek coins⁴ and becomes an indispensable attribute of the Iranian goddess of fortune Ardoxsho

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1. Seyffert, Oskar, A dictionary of Antiquities, pp.24-25.
 2. Jobes, Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbol, p.79. It reminds one of Indian Kalpavrkṣa (the wish-yielding tree). A coin of the Yaudheya king Brahmanya Deva has on its reverse a Lakṣmī image and a Kalpavrkṣa on her left. Smith, IMC., p.181, pl.XXI, 15.
 3. Originally a nature goddess who shaped the harvest and destinies of women in childbirth. Jobes, op.cit., p. 96.
 4. Cf: On a coin with Aphrodite on the obverse, two cornucopiae appear on the reverse. Camb.Anc.Hist., vol. VIII, plate on the cover.

on Indian coins at about the beginning of the Christian era. Ardoxsho, although her name has been the subject of great controversy among philologists,¹ can safely be defined as a feminine embodiment of the principle of abundance and prosperity, and seems to perform the functions which were close to those of Greek Tyche, Roman Fortuna and Indian Śrī-Lakṣmī. She brings all kinds of desirable things: jewelled furniture, beautiful women, offspring, chariots, sturdy camels, hoards of gold and silver and victory,² thus recalling the image of Śrī-Lakṣmī (as has been pictured in the Śrī-Sūkta and the Taittirīya Upaniṣad),³ the goddess who has already appeared on the Saka coins and whose functions were appropriated by Iranian deities on Kuṣāna coins. In the later literature, Ardoxsho is equated with the resplendent glory of the Kayan kings (i.e. Kavaem Khvareno) and in Zoroastrian sanskrit literature, the term Khvareno is translated by both the names Lakṣmī and Śrī,

1. Cf: Rosenfield, John M., Dynastic Art of the Kushanas, pp. 74-75.

2. Aśi Yašt., XVII; Trans. SBE., vol. XXIII, p.41 ff.

3. Taitt.Up., I,4.

in the sense of the abundance of the regime.¹

Ardoxsho does not appear on the early Kuṣāna coins issued by Kaniṣka, Huviṣka and ~~Vasudeva~~[?], but becomes a constant element on later Kuṣāna coins minted south of the Hindukush. She is represented here as seated on a high-backed throne, dressed in flowing robes, holding a cornucopia with sheaves of grain emerging from the mouth.² This type may be traced back to the Roman Solidi with a seated figure of Abundantia³ and

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1. Bailey, H.W., Zoroastrian Problems, p.13. Cf: The glory of the Kayans (Yt. XIX.), which descends from heaven and accompanies the faithful rulers and champions of the religions successively. Dīnkard, Book IX, 22, 7; SBE., XXXVII, p.227, n.1. Even mythologically she resembles Śrī. She is, in Iranian mythology, the emanation or divine essence of kings. When Yima speaks falsely, she forsakes him and passes on to Mitra, Thraetaona and Karesaspa and finally seeks shelter in the world ocean. She attaches herself to monarchs as long as they are worthy representatives of divine power. Jobes, op.cit., p.926.
 2. Rosenfield, John M., op.cit., Coin Nos. 237-241.
 3. Allan, CGC., Introd. p.IXX; Cf: pl.V, 1-8.



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ARDOXSHO ON THE COINS OF THE KUSHANAS

more recent prototypes were the standing or enthroned Tyche and Demeter¹ used by the Indo-Greek and Śaka predecessors of the Kuṣāṇas, but the seated style alone persisted into Gupta coinage, converted into an emblem of Lakṣmī. The Archer and the Standard type coins of Samudra Gupta, as well as the Archer type of Chandra Gupta,² reveal the fact that on all these coins the Lakṣmī image is just a replica of the Ardoxsho type of the Kuṣāṇa coins. But gradually the cornucopia disappears and she seems to hold a lotus instead.³ This has led J. Allan to conclude that the significance of cornucopia was unintelligible to the Hindus and that its resemblance to a flower leads them to replace it by a lotus.⁴ But its contradiction lies in the fact that already in the Rāmāyana the bovine horn (ṛsabha śṛṅga) has been regarded as a symbol of auspiciousness and plenty,⁵ (a palaeolithic art relief has a woman

1. Whitehead, R.B., PMC., pl.XI,217; XII,218; Rosenfield, op.cit., Coin No. 279.

2. Allan, CGC., pl.I, 1-17; II,1-5; IV,1-7; VI,1-6, etc.

3. Ib., pl.IX, 1,2,5,7,8,9,12,13.

4. Ib., Introd., p.LXXII.

5. Rām., IV,26,33-4, Subhairvṛsabhaśṛṅgaiśca.

holding a bison horn in her right hand¹ which might be contended to be a prototype of late cornucopia concept). There is a representation of a bearer of cornucopia at Amarāvati of about second century A.D.² Moreover, this transformation of the cornucopia into a lotus flower does not seem to be an isolated incident; along with it, all other attributes were changing to adopt their own conventional characteristic. Thus while the cornucopia gave way to the lotus, the throne changed into a lotus seat³ (padmāsana, the very characteristic of Lakṣmī) both changing simultaneously. And if we analyse some other coins, Lakṣmī will appear as holding a lotus as well as a cornucopia,⁴ standing sidewise⁵ resembling a female deity on an Indo-Greek coin, defined as a city goddess.⁶ In this character Lakṣmī still dominates, as is evident from her rājalakṣmī aspect, the aspect

1. Camb. Anc. History, vol. of plates, I, p.8, pl.C.

2. Now in possession of Government Museum, Madras.

3. Allan, J., CGC., pl.VI, 10-18; pl.VII, 1-19.

4. Thus denying the confusion of the cornucopia with a flower.

5. Allan, J., CGC., pl.II, 6-13.

6. Whitehead, R.B., PMC., pl.VIII, 609.



LAKṢMĪ ON THE COINS OF CANDRA GUPTA II.

which inspires her to protect the fortune of a regime as a guardian deity. Thus the cornucopia held by Lakṣmī in these coins cannot be contended as a meaningless borrowing although here it possibly survives as a later Kuṣāna trait.

This cornucopia and lion combination recalls an amalgamation of Ardoxsho and Nana (the Iranian deity whose conveyance is lion) and in this case is possibly a fusion between Lakṣmī and Durgā.

An interesting specimen, a unique gold drachm¹ (provenance is still unknown) may be brought into notice in this context. It shows on the reverse a goddess seated frontally, holding a fillet and a staff with three knobs in two of her hands. She seems to sit on a lion vāhana and there is also an elephant head at the edge of the coin. Thus it seems to be a more advanced specimen of the syncretic combination of female divinities from the Kuṣāna pantheon; she has the attributes of Ardoxsho (seated frontally, holding a fillet, dressed in classical robes), the lion of Nana and her lunar element and if there is in fact an elephant head, the motif comes closer to the simhavāhinī Gajalakṣmī

1. Rosenfield, op.cit., fig.14.

figure at Bilsād,¹ which is a combination of Lakṣmī (who is more like Ardoxsho) and of Durgā (whose resemblance with Nana is enormous).

The traits that constitute the saumya or the gentle aspect of Durgā, have mostly been borrowed from the Lakṣmī concept.² Durgā entered the Brāhmanic pantheon much later than Lakṣmī, and there is nothing in the early Vedic literature to prove that the sages ever contemplated a goddess who could have served as a prototype of Durgā. Ambikā is mentioned in the Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā,³ but only as a malignant deity, destroying human life on behalf of her brother Rudra. It is only in the Kenopaniṣad⁴ that we come across bahūśobhamānā umā, the first appearance of this name and indicating a completely different character, as a benevolent mother

1. Rosenfield, op.cit., p. 119.

2. Cf: The Kāthaka Brāhmaṇa Saṃkalana mantrāḥ where Durgā is celebrated by the same names that glorified Śrī in the Śrīsūkta, tāmagnivarnam tapasā jvalantīm.

3. Vāj.Saṃh., III,52.

4. Tālavakāra Up., III,12. The later text of the Rūpamaṇḍana includes Śrī among the six saumya manifestations of Gaurī: Umā, Pārvatī, Śrī, Rambhā, Tripurā and Totalā. Thus Lakṣmī was apparently absorbed by the Devī in the Śaiva circle in later times.

goddess, the source of all food and fertility.

Thus it seems that all the fine attributes of Lakṣmī were utilised in order to build up this ideal aspect of Durgā. This is more obvious from the Devī-Māhātmya section of the Mārkaṇḍeya purāṇa which states quite explicitly that all the forces of good are from her form as Śrī whereas the powers of evil are from Alakṣmī,¹ and this invokes the Vedic conception stated in the Atharvaveda, ramantām puṇyā lakṣmīryā pāpīstā anīnaśam.² Apparently, a similar sentiment recurs in a passage in the Harivaṃśa, in an eulogy to Durgā which says 'You are Lakṣmī (the goddess of plenty and prosperity), but for the annihilation of the demons you appear as Alakṣmī (in a warlike form)', lakṣmīralakṣmī-rūpeṇa dānavānam vadhāya.³

Durgā and Lakṣmī have frequently been confused in literature and so it is by no means surprising that this

1. Agrawala, V.S., Devī-Māhātmyam, The Glorification of the Great Goddess, p.22; Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, XII, 36-37. bhava-kāle nṛṇāṃ saiva lakṣmīrvṛddhī prajā grhe saivābhavē tathā lakṣmīrvināśayopajāyate.

2. AV., VII, 115, 4.

3. Hariv., II, 3, 12.

confusion extends to their iconographic representations as well. In the Mahābhārata, Durgā is said to be the same as Lakṣmī.¹ In the Mahānirvāna Tantra, in the Ādyakālīsvarūpa stotra, Durgā is addressed as Kamalā (Lakṣmī) who is all śaktis. The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa recounts among the names of Lakṣmī, Devī and Vibhāvarī, which are generally applied to Durgā.²

Even at a later period, this fusion of the two goddesses persists. The Lalitāsahasranāman (i.e. thousand names of Devī) reveals the first name of the goddess as Śrīmātā, while the last name seems to be Lalitāmbikā, denoting Durgā. It again says that "Rarely one in this world is devoted to the names of Lalitā. It is by repeating the names of other deities in crores of births that faith is generated to repeat the names of Śrī devī",³ thus implying a confusion between the two. The Phalaśruti says that the recitation of these verses is highly pleasing to Śrīdevī, idaṃ viśeṣāchrīdevyāḥ stotraṃ prītividhāyakam.⁴

1. Mbh. iv, 8, 7-8; 22-23. (Kumbh Ed.)

2. Viṣṇu.P., III, 8, 4.

3. Lalitāsahasranāman, phalaśruti, Ch. III, pp. 73-74.

4. Ib., verse 4.

In the Skanda purāṇa, a description of Śrīmātā (Śrī-Lakṣmī) runs as raktāṃvaradharā ... raktamālyā daśabhuja pañcavaktrā and thus portrays her in a manner which, although goes with some of the terrible aspects of Durgā, hardly coincides with the Lakṣmī image.¹ In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Indra addresses her as Jagaddhātṛī² (the creatrix of the world) a well known appellation of Durgā and if we compare this stava² with the Devīstava of the Devīmāhātmya section of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa a great deal of similarity will be detected. Even in the Lakṣmī-stava in the Padma Purāṇa, the Prakṛti rūpa of Lakṣmī is fused with the all-pervading concept of Durgā.³ In the Devībhāgavata Purāṇa, the Prakṛti is said to take the forms of Durgā, Rādhā, Sāvitrī, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī at the time of creation, gaṇeśa-janani durgā rādhā lakṣmīḥ sarasvatī sāvitṛī ca sṛṣṭividhau prakṛtiḥ pañcadhā smṛtā.⁴

1. Sk.P., Dharm.Māhāt., XVII,11-14.

2. Viṣ.P., I,9,116-19; cf: V,1,81-84.

3. Padma P., Uttara Kh., CCLIV, 12-20; 24-27.

4. Devī Bhg.P., IX,1,1.

Lakṣmī has been addressed under different names, being the spouse of the ten different avatāras and thus "elle est Sītā avec Rāma et pour Kalkin, elle se confond avec Durgā."¹

Even as the spouse of Viṣṇu, Durgā has been connected, if not equated, with Lakṣmī. Thus, in the Devīmāhātmya section, throughout the stava by Indra and others to Devi Kātyāyanī (a form of Durgā), she is invoked as Nārāyaṇī, the consort of Nārāyaṇa (i.e. Viṣṇu)² and is explicitly addressed as Vaiṣṇavī Sakti.³ In the same text she is invoked as Viṣṇumāyā, i.e. the supreme Sakti of Bhagavān Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa.⁴ Even in the Mahābhārata⁵ and in the purāṇas,⁶ Durgā is

1. Renou, L., L'Inde Classique, Vol.1, p.521. The Daśamahāvidyās of the 10th century A.D. are supposed to be modelled after the ten avatāras of Viṣṇu and deal with the ten different aspects of Durgā.

2. Devīm., Ch.XI.

3. Ib., XI,4.

4. Ib., V,6-12; XIII,2. "It should be observed here that Devī conceived of as Viṣṇumāyā is no other than Nārāyaṇī and the great Bhāgavata teachers who were pledged to the doctrine of an all comprehensive synthesis of Vedic and puranic thoughts and definitions, profounded the essential identity of Kātyāyanī and Nārāyaṇī." Agrawala, V.S., Devīm., p.23.

5. Mbh., IV,8,2 (Kumbh.Ed.).

6. Mārka.P., Devīm., V,6 & 12; XI, 7-23; XIII,2.

Viṣṇupriyā, Nārāyaṇavarapriyā. In the Varāha Purāṇa, it has been stated that Nārāyaṇa created Umā by dividing himself into two.¹

In the Virāṭaparvan of the Mahābhārata² Durgā is the sister of Kṛṣṇa and wife of Nārāyaṇa, and is invoked as if she has no connection with Śiva.

In this context we may refer to three Sanskrit inscriptions written in old Javanese script, found in the Ratubaka plateau, central Java (856-857 A.D.). All three inscriptions are similar in nature; they all begin with a strophe addressed to Śiva followed by another in the same metre as the first one and addressed to some form of Śrī-Lakṣmī. These three inscriptions refer to Śiva by three different names in his three different aspects, while his female counterparts likewise are different. In one, she assists the divine dancer in his terrific cemetary dance; in the second one, she is represented as embracing the God and fulfilling all his desires, and in the third inscription, she accompanies him in his battle. But what is

1. Varāh.P., IX, 2-5.

2. Mbh., IV, 8, 2. (Kumbh. Ed.).

strange is that nowhere is she denoted by any of the many names of Śiva's spouse, but by the names of (a) Śrī (the common designation of Viṣṇu's spouse as well as a symbol of prosperity and royal majesty); (b) Śūra Lakṣmī (which possibly suggests the same Lakṣmī Śrī, in her Śāktic aspect of conferring success in battle) and (c) Mahallakṣmī, a variant of Mahālakṣmī (which although sometimes denoting Durgā or Sarasvatī, may be used here to stress her Lakṣmī aspect). Thus these three inscriptions address the namaskāra to the combination of a form of Śiva and a form of Lakṣmī Śrī.¹ Here we might refer to some coins belonging to Saśāṇka which depict Śiva (on his bull) and Lakṣmī (in her Gajalakṣmī aspect) on their two sides.²

In a later age, Lakṣmī along with Sarasvatī, was associated with Durgā as one of her daughters, as we find them in the autumnal celebration of the Durgā-pujā where the central image of Durgā has Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī on either side as her two daughters, while

1. Cf: De Casparis, J.G., Selected Inscriptions, pp. 244-277.

2. Supra, p. 161.

Kārttikeya and Gaṇeśa on the two extreme sides, sitting on their respective vāhanas, accompany their mother. In the Nāradiya purāṇa, Kūrma Purāṇa and Dharma purāṇa,¹ Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī are the two daughters of Durgā and Śiva, also known as Jayā and Vijayā. The idea of such an image may have originated from the Matsya purāṇa² description where Jayā, Vijayā, Kārttikeya and Gaṇeśa are represented as surrounding the central image of Durgā.

Some scholars suggest that although Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī appear as her daughters, they may be the Vibhūtis or emanations of the great mother goddess.³ Others have explained the relationship as being the result of reproducing the energies of Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā together, which with the lapse of time, gradually took this modern form.⁴

1. Cf: SBDG., Srī Rādhā...., p.52.

2. Mat.P. CCDC, 19.

3. SBDG., Aspects of Religious Thoughts, p.57. In the Devi Bhg.P. (X,12,82) it is stated how Devī, in due course, assumes the forms of Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī, Kālyāṇcaiva Matālakṣmyāḥ Sarasvatyāḥ Kramena ca.

4. In many parts of India, they form a trinity of the divine Śakti.

GAURĪ

Even Gaurī, whose father is Himālaya,¹ whose husband is Śiva (Gaurīśa),² whose son is Kārttikeya and who is thus generally identified with Durgā (she is also the goddess of the mountain peak, Mahādevī,³ sister of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa),⁴ bears some affinities with Śrī-Lakṣmī. The Mārkaṇḍeya purāṇa states that the female energies of Viṣṇu and Śiva as Śrī and Gaurī are but the forms of the same supreme mother.⁵ This text also indicates a fusion of these three divinities in the verse

sarvamaṅgalā maṅgalya śive sarvārthasādhike
śaraṇye tryamvake gaurī nārāyaṇī namo'stu te⁶

Gaurī means one who is of a fair or yellow complexion. The yellow colour is pauṣṭika⁷ 'nutritive' and Gaurī is known as the goddess of the colour of ripe corn.⁸

1. Kālidāsa, Abhijñāna Śakuntalam, VI,17.

2. Cf: Mbh., XIV,8,29 f.; Rājat., V,158.

3. Mbh., III,84,151.

4. Cf: Hopkins, E.W., Ep.Myth., pp. 224-5.

5. Mārkaṇḍeya P., Devīm., IV,10.

6. Ib., XI,9.

7. Atri Saṁh., XLVI,10.

8. Gonda, J., AEV., p.218 f.n.

Baskets filled with unhusked ripe corn represent fortune, the goddess herself. This would serve to identify Lakṣmī with Gaurī, "the Indian ceres",¹ the goddess of ripe corn. This relationship is supported by the evidence of the Caitra-Gaurī festival held in honour of Gaurī, whose image is adorned in the form of a matron of the colour of ripe corn, holding a lotus, who often also holds a conch, a discus and a club² (the emblems of Viṣṇu). The Mahābhārata refers to Gaurī as the wife of Varuṇa;³ Śiva himself mentions Gaurī as Varuṇa's wife,⁴ While Varuṇānī as Lakṣmī implies a close relation between Lakṣmī and Varuṇa.⁵

Even in iconography, a similarity between the Lakṣmī image and the Gaurī concept is worth noticing, for example, the godhā (alligator) is common to both goddesses.

That the godhā is the vāhana of Gaurī is evident

1. Gonda, J., AEV., p. 218, f.n.

2. Ib., pp. 237-38.

3. Mbh., V, 117, 9; reme ... varuṇaśca yathā gauryāṃ.

4. Ib., XIII, 134, 4f. varuṇasya tathā gaurī (Poona Ed.).

5. Cf: Coomaraswamy, Yakṣas, II, pp. 36, f.n. 2; 56.

from the phrase godhāsanā bhaved gaurī.¹ In Madhya Pradesh, people used to worship the godhā (alligator) as their principal totem (Kulaketu). In the Brhaddharma Purāṇa,² there is the story of the deception of Kālaketu by the golden Godhikā, which was soon associated with the principal deity of Madhya Pradesh; during the time of the fusion of the Aryan and non-Aryan elements, this deity was Gaurī. But later, when ~~Kaliṅgarāja~~ ^{the} ruler of Madhya Pradesh, Caṇḍikā was his tutelary goddess; and so it is no wonder that Gaurī was soon absorbed within the Caṇḍī concept (another manifestation of Durgā), a process which appears in the Caṇḍimaṅgala Kāvya.³

The association of the Mother goddess with an alligator or alligators on the discs from Taxila and Kosam is of great importance in the developed Śakti cult in India. In the medieval Pārvatī images also, Godhās invariably appear on the pedestals as well as in the Umā-Maheśvara relief in south India. One of the earliest reliefs in which a godhā is shown⁴

1. Viṣdh.P., III, 58.

2. As mentioned in S.C. Bhattacharya's Maṅgala Candīr Gīt, Introd., p.CCX.

3. SBDG., BSSS., p.187.

4. Banerjea, J.N., DHI., p.172.

stretched in the two hands of the twelve-armed Mahiṣa -mardini is carved on the Candra Gupta facade at Udaigiri (Bhilsā), which can be dated back to 401/2 A.D.

The godhā constitutes the seat of Śrī-Lakṣmī as well, as is apparent from the verse which describes the rosary and lotus in two of her hands, the other two being in the abhaya and varada mudrā,

akṣasūtram tathā padmamabhayañca varam tathā
godhāsanā śriyā mūrti grhe pujyā śriya sadā.¹

The Aparājitaprcchā implies the same:

akṣapadmābhayavaram godhikāsana samsthitā
śriyā mūrtistu tanmam grhe pujyā śriye sadā.²

But in the Devī Purāṇa we come across a different type of description of Gaurī which recommends vr̥ṣa and padma as her seat while she holds a rosary and a pitcher in her hands,

Gaurī śaṅkhenduvarṇābhā śarvarī abhidhe bhavet
vr̥ṣapadmāsanaśrtā sāksasūtra kamaṇḍalum³

Here vr̥ṣa and padma, both being her vāhana, may suggest

1. Rūpamaṇḍana, V,4.

2. Ap.Pr., XXII,12.

3. Devī P., I, (dvitiya viśrti vidhi), 39.

some fusion, since the bull is the vāhana of Siva and the padma the āsana of Lakṣmī.

It is interesting to note how one Gajalakṣmī image, whose iconographic specifications ascribe it to the Gupta age, is worshipped nowadays as Maṅgala Gaurī in the Gavaneśvara area.¹

Thus the resemblance between Lakṣmī and Gaurī is rather remarkable; the Lotus queen Padma seems to be the Gaurī of Rājasthān,² or we may conclude by saying that Gaurī is, in essence, the Śrī-rūpa of Devī.

ANNAPŪRNĀ

Lakṣmī is the beneficent Annapūrṇā (the goddess who is possessed of plenty of food) in another garb.³ Annapūrṇā is an aspect of Durgā, but her conceptual idea is very similar to that of Lakṣmī; Annapūrṇā's very name is strong evidence for this. The Tantrasāra⁴

1. Govinda Chandra, Prācīna Bhārat meṁ Lakṣmī pratimā, p. 128.

2. Tod, Annals of Rajasthan, p.673.

3. Encyclopaedia of India, 3rd ed., vol.11, p.660.

4. Avalon, A, Hymns to the goddess , p.67.

even states that if one recites the Annapūrṇā-Stotra Lakṣmī will abide in his house forever. In this context, reference may be made to the first and third slabs of the Kuntalgarh Inscription¹ which although of a late period, gives a description of Mahālakṣmī,² but her temple is now generally known as that of Annapūrṇā, while the idol that is worshipped here is the original image of Lakṣmī with a lotus flower in her hand and elephants on either side. This suggests an amalgamation of Lakṣmī and the various forms of Durgā.

The fusion of these two goddesses Lakṣmī and Durgā (in her different aspects) in their iconographic representation is convincingly demonstrated by an inscribed image which is dated in the third regnal year of Lakṣmaṇa Sena and is now in the collection of the Dacca Museum.³ It shows a couchant lion as the vehicle of the goddess who holds in three of her hands aṅkuṣa (goad), padma (lotus) and Kamaṇḍalu (pitcher), the fourth one

1. Ep.Ind., vol.XXIV, p.307.

2. Ib., verses 51-54.

3. Bhattasali, N.K., Br. Images in the Dacca Museum, pp.202-3, pl.LXIX.

being in the varadā mudrā; and, as in a Gajalakṣmī image, four elephants are pouring water over her. In fact, the pedestal inscription which describes her as Caṇḍī, in spite of its having a definite Gajalakṣmī motif, proves beyond doubt an amalgamation of Lakṣmī and Caṇḍī (a form of Durgā who absorbed within herself the Gaurī concept). N.K. Bhattasali thinks that it represents Bhuvaneśvarī, on the authority of the Sāradātilaka Tantra. But his view does not seem very convincing, since in the Tantra, Bhuvaneśvarī is said to be bathed by the elephants only in her form as Lakṣmī,¹ and there is no mention of a lion in that verse. But on the whole, this image supplies us with a unique specimen, where both of the Lakṣmī-Ambikā aspects are convincingly prominent. (Another representation [of an earlier period] carved on the basreliefs of Bādāmī may be cited in this respect. It shows the gods on their respective vāhanas approaching Devī [who can be seen at the right end of the panel in the act of killing the demon], but the goddess approached seems to be Śrī in

1. Avalon, A., Hymns to the Goddess , pp. 33-34.

her abhiseka form and thus betrays a fusion of the two respective goddesses)¹ Could we call this a female equivalent of Harihara?²

MAHĀLAKṢMĪ

The Mahālakṣmī aspect of Lakṣmī seems to be the outcome of this fusion between Lakṣmī and Durgā, which, according to Gopinath Rao "illustrates one of the primary aspects of the principal cult icon of the Śāktas, which stands for the supreme fountain head of all power".³ The Mānasāra renders it as the 'great' (Mahā) Lakṣmī in contrast with the 'ordinary' (Sāmānyā) Lakṣmī).

Mahālakṣmī is the goddess in whom all the three gunas, sattva, rajas and tamas are present. Mahālakṣmī, in whom the rajoguna predominates, assumes in the time of dissolution the form of Mahākālī in whom tamoguna predominates; Mahākālī is her four-armed, secondary form, blue in colour, holding a sword, a skull cup, a severed head and a shield in her four hands, ornamented

1. Banerji, R.D., MAI, XXV, pl.XI, c.

2. *Infra*, p. 273a ff.

3. T.A.G. Rao, EHI, vol.1, p.337.

with a skull garland. Out of the great Mahālakṣmī, again emanates the śuklavarnā Mahā-Sarasvatī in whom sattvaguna predominates. She holds in her hands a rosary of skulls, an elephant goad, a lyre and a manuscript.¹ According to the Prādhānika Rahasya, from these three forms of Śakti, one primary and the others emanatory, were evolved in turn Brahmā and Śrī, Rudra and Trayī or Vedavidyā (Sarasvatī) and Viṣṇu and Gaurī.² Mahālakṣmī ordered Brahmā to take Sarasvatī as his consort and the great Brahmaṇḍa was born out of this union. Rudra, i.e. Śiva was married to Gaurī and they both broke open the egg of gold. Lakṣmī herself³ became the consort of Nārāyaṇa and both afforded protection to the universe. These details suggest an amalgamation of all the deities into one concept; all the gods and goddesses are but manifestations of one single supreme goddess (Mahālakṣmī) and should not be understood as separate individual deities.⁴

1. Banerjea, DHI., p.496 f: .

2. Cf: DHI., pp.496-97. . .

3. The very word 'herself' stresses on her Lakṣmī aspect.

4. Cf: Mārk.P., Ch.XLVI; Devīm., XCII; Rao, EHI., vol.I, pp.335-337; Śiva,P.Jñāna Saṁh. vi. 'ahameva tridha bhinnā tiṣṭhāmi trividhair guṇaiḥ gaurī lakṣmī surā jyoti rajossatvatamogunaiḥ' DurgāSaptasatī, p.6, line 2.

The Śiva Purāṇa¹ says that Śiva told Viṣṇu that Lakṣmī would be born of Prakṛti and that two other portions would be born as well, who would be called Brahmāṇī (Sarasvatī) and Mahākālī. Viṣṇu, he says, will take Lakṣmī as his śakti and perform his duties. Brahmā will take Sarasvatī, and he (Śiva) will be associated with Kālī.

The Lalitāsahasranāman interprets the name Mahālakṣmī by stating that Mahala is the name of a daitya whom she destroyed; hence she is called Mahā-lasa or Mahālakṣmī and resides on the western shore at the foot of the Sahya Mountain.²

There are many iconographic references to Mahālakṣmī in different texts, (gadām khetam pānapātram ca bibhrati nāgam liṅgam ca bibhratī nrpa mūrdham) and in most of them, she has a four armed concrete form, in her hands are placed a mace, a club, a skull-cup and she also has a snake, a liṅga and yoni on her head.³

An image from Haveri, described by Cousens as "an image, probably of Pārvatī",⁴ shows the deity standing

1. Śiva P., III, 35-37.

2. Lalitāsahasranāman, PP 131-32. Cf: Rao, EHI., vol.1, p.336; Banerjea, DHI., p.496.

4. Cousens, H., Chālukyān Arch., p.85.

under an ornate makara torana in samabhaṅga pose, carrying in her four hands bījāpuraka, gadā, carma and kamandalu. She also carries on her head a liṅga placed on a yonipatta and a snake canopying the liṅga with its hood. Thus this sculpture corresponds closely to the preceding descriptions, except for the caurī bearers who stand on either side carrying a bījāpuraka in each of their hands.

There is another interesting specimen of Devī from Pālikherā, now in the collection of the Mathura museum,¹ in which the goddess supports a liṅga over her head with an extra pair of hands. In the same museum, we find another sculpture² in which the liṅga over the head is supported by two Devas. These sculptures prove beyond any doubt that one of her special features was that of carrying a liṅga over her head.

The Viśvakarmā Śāstra ascribes to the Mahālakṣmī image in Kolhāpur the attributes of pānapātra (drinking vessel) kaumodakī, khetaka and śrīphala, and mentions that the image should be as that of Lakṣmī,

1. V.S. Agrawala, CBIMM., p.53, No.882.

2. Ib., No.239.

kollāpuram vinānyatra mahālakṣmīryadocyate
lakṣmīvatsātadā kāryā rūpābharanabhūṣitā
dakṣiṇādhahkare pātram urdhve kaumodakīm tataḥ
vāmordhve khetakam dhatte śrīphalam tadadhaḥ kare
bibhratī mastake liṅgam pūjanīya vibhūtaye¹

thus the whole image betrays some kind of agreement between the Lakṣmī and Durgā concepts.

The Rūpamaṇḍana² illustrates a similar idea and the concrete representation of Mahālakṣmī in Kolhapur seems to have followed these descriptions in every detail. In her lower right hand she carries a pānapātra and in her upper right hand is a club (gadā kaumodakī, an emblem of Viṣṇu); in her lower left hand is a shield (khetaka) and she carries on her head a liṅga.³ Examples of this form abound in decorative elements, excessive draperies and ornamentation; this image has made Kolhāpur a famous place of pilgrimage. This temple is still sometimes called the temple of Ambāmāī and may have been originally dedicated to this ancient goddess who later became identified with Mahālakṣmī,⁴

1. As cited in Rao, EHI., vol.1, Appendix C, p.136.

2. Rūpamaṇḍana, V, 59-60.

3. Shukla, Hindu Canons of Iconography, p.310.

4. West, E.W., 'The Divine Mothers or Local Goddesses of India', IA., vol.X, Sept. 1881, p.245.

just as she is identified in Gujarat with Bhavānī where the famous temple of Ambā-Bhavānī is situated.

In all these images, the liṅga emblem of Mahālakṣmī supports her Śākta aspect, which is further emphasised by another description from the Rūpamaṇḍana which, along with the triśūla and pānapātra, also refers to nīlankanṭha as one of her emblems, nīlakanṭham tathā nāgā (nāgam) mahālakṣmīr prakīrtitā.¹

Her Śākta form is apparent in the Devīpurāṇa also:

mahālakṣmī prakartavyā nrtyamānā kapālinī
karṭṛkāmuṇḍā khaṭvāṅgī nṛmālā ... dhārinī²
pavitrādhārane pavitrāyām umādevī indhanveva lakṣmī³

While the Viśvakarmā Śastra describes the Mahālakṣmī image as possessing only four hands, the Caṇḍīkalpa describes her developed form as having eighteen hands holding such objects as the rosary, hatchet, club, arrow, thunderbolt, lotus, bow, small pitcher, staff, spear, sword, shield, bell and wine cup. The last line states: seve sairibhamardanīmiha mahālakṣmīm sarojasthitām⁴

1. Rūpamaṇḍana, V,35.

2. Devī P., LVI,52.

3. Ibid., 42.

4. As cited in EHI., vol.1, App.C, p.136.

thus explicitly declaring this, though lotus seated, to be her Sairibhamardanī form which is the destructive aspect of the Śakti as represented in many other manifestations, such as Mahiṣāsūramardinī.

In the Pañcarātra texts and the Kathāsaritsāgara¹ Mahālakṣmī is sometimes given as a name of Dākṣāyaṇī in Karavīra. It is also the name of a girl, thirteen years of age and not yet arrived at puberty, who represents Durgā at the Dusserāh celebration.²

The Mānasara describes Mahālakṣmī as possessing the three eyes which are characteristic of Durgā, caturbhujām trinetraṃca mukutaṃ kuṇḍalam (kuntalam) bhavet.³ But the same text also emphasises her Lakṣmī aspect when it lays stress on her lotus emblem, apare daksine padmam ... vāme nīlotpalamvāpi raktapadma udhṛtamnuvā. In this context, we may refer to the Prādhānika Rahasya of Caṇḍī which states, sarvāsyādyā mahālakṣmī strīguṇā parameśvarī sā lakṣmyā lakṣmyāsvarūpā sā vyāpyā kṛtsnām

1. Cf: Williams, M.M., RTL., p.385.

2. Cf: Ib., SED., p.800(a).

3. Mānasāra, Trimūrti lakṣaṇam, LIV, 19 & 21.

vyavasthitā.¹ The Devīmāhātmya also states that the goddess is comprised of three guṇas,² each of which is a pura, and Tripurāsundarī (a form of Durgā) becomes manifest as Mahāsarasvatī (equal to dhyāna), Mahākālī (equal to Kriyā), and Mahālakṣmī (equal to artha). This identity of Mahālakṣmī with artha suggests her identification with Lakṣmī, goddess of wealth.

The Lakṣmī aspect seems to be more prominent in a verse from the Skandapurāṇa quoted by Hemādri in his Caturvarga Cintāmaṇi.³

caturbhujaṃ mahālakṣmīm vājiprsthagatāntathā
daṇḍākṣa sūtra varadam rathaivabhayaapāṇikam
padmāsanām padmahastām padmam padmalekṣanām
diggajaih snāpyamānāṅca kāñcanaih kalasottamaih

Here, in addition to all her attributes, viz. daṇḍa, akṣa, and her hands being in the abhaya and the varada mudrā, the Gajalakṣmī aspect is present, which indicates her Lakṣmī bias. But surprisingly a horse seems to constitute her seat, although no image of her with a horse has been brought to our notice yet.

1. Prādhānika Rahasya, IV.

2. Mārk. P., Devīm., I, 59; IV, 6.

3. Hemādri, Caturvarga Cintāmaṇi, II, pt. 2, p. 496.

Thus, the Mahālakṣmī aspect evidently exhibits a fusion of the two goddesses, Durgā and Lakṣmī. In order to construct this aspect, apart from the benign and benevolent characteristic of Lakṣmī, the ugra nature of Durgā was necessary, neither of these goddesses could have served the purpose alone.¹

INDIVIDUAL LAKṢMĪ MŪRTIS

Iconographic texts containing descriptions of Śrī Lakṣmī refer to her two-, four-, and rarely many-armed varieties, but the two-armed varieties are most common, and they do not vary much except for the attributes to be held in the hands. Thus, while the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa and, following it, the Samarāṅgaṇa Sūtradhāra^{say}, that the left hand should be on the hip and the right hand should hold a lotus,

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1. The ten armed Durgā image is believed to represent the combined ten hands of the four armed Brahmā, four armed Viṣṇu and two armed Śiva when Durgā is considered to be Mahālakṣmī, Mahākālī and Mahāsarasvatī in one (Cf: supra, p.209, where the representations of Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī beside the modern Durgā image have been explained as being her two emanations or as being the two wives of Viṣṇu and Brahmā). But Mahāsarasvatī does not seem to play a conspicuous role in it.

kaṭideśaniviṣṭena vāmastena śobhanā
sapadmena (vāntena?) dakṣiṇena sūcismītā,¹

the Āgamas state that her two hands should hold the lotus and the Śrīphala, though they differ regarding which hand should hold what. Thus while the Amśumadbhedāgama says ambujam dakṣiṇe haste vāme śrīphalamiṣyate,² the Pūrvakāraṇāgama states

nāgahastasamaubāhū keyūra kaṭakajvalau
pañkajam śrīphalamcaiva vāmake dakṣiṇe api ca.³

But all the texts agree about certain features of Śrī Lakṣmī: she should be represented in the first stage of youth, with full breasts and broad hips (the ideal features of motherhood), her face resembling the full moon, lips like the bimba fruit, wearing golden ornaments set with various jewels, her ears should be adorned with nakrakunḍalas (an invariable feature of Lakṣmī).⁴ These descriptions go well with the names Śrī and Lakṣmī as they symbolise universal beauty and prosperity. There are ample materials to prove that

1. Samarāṅgana Sūtradhāra, LXXVII, 51.

2. Amśumadbhedāgama, Ch.LIX.

3. Pūrvakāraṇāgama, Ch.XII.

4. Mat.P., CCLXI, 40-47; cf: Samarāṅgana Sūtradhāra, LXXVII, 50-52.

sculptors, from a very early date, followed these details in order to reproduce Śrī-Lakṣmī images.

Of the two types mentioned above, the latter seems to be a later development while the former was in vogue since very early days. It was such a common mode to portray Lakṣmī that a female figure, standing amidst a lotus forest, holding a lotus with her upraised right hand with her left hand on the hip, has been unanimously identified by scholars with Śrī-Lakṣmī, the only objectionable factor being a pair of wings, a very unusual characteristic with Indian female divinities.¹ This widespread popularity of Śrī-Lakṣmī has also led to her identification with some female figures occurring on the reverse of ^{the} coins of Pantaleon and Agathocles, although no other determining factor is apparent for such an identification apart from a flower held by them.²

En passim, I must refer to some images which reflect upon ^{Lakṣmī's} ~~Śrī~~ various characteristics; ^{icons of the Gupta} /period seem to have played a unique role in this field. On one

1. ASIAR, 1913-14, pl.XLIV, g.i.

2. Gardner, BMC., GK.and Scythic, pl.III, 9; IV,9.

of the Gupta coins, the usual stool of Śrī-Lakṣmī is in the form of a boat.¹ It is even clearer on a seal from Basārḥ.² This recalls the passage Vānījye vasate lakṣmīḥ³ and also substantiates the view held by scholars that the story of her emergence from the sea is actually an allusion to the fact that Lakṣmī is to be acquired by trade and commerce. Certain Gupta inscriptions also refer to her association with the sea, svayanvarayeva r(ā)jalakṣmyādhigatena catuḥsamudraparyyanta-prathita yaśasā.⁴

A certain female figure appears on the obverse of some Gupta coins where she is depicted on the left of the king (presumably Skanda Gupta) and has been assumed to be a representation of the queen. But more reasonable is her identification with Lakṣmī as the figure carries a lotus,⁵ while as the queen, the figure carries a caurī on the Aśvamedha type⁶ and on the Candra Gupta-Kumāradevī coins,

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1. Altekar, A.S., The Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard, pl.XIV, 14.
 2. Spooner, 'Excavations at Basārḥ', ASIAR., 1913-14, p.130, pl.XLVI, 93.
 3. Cf: Mukhopadhyay, M., 'Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī in Sanskrit Inscriptions', Lectures and Seminars, No.V.B., 1970, Calcutta, p.111.
 4. 'Erāṇ Stone Pillar Inscription of Budha Gupta', CII, III, No.19, lines 6-7.
 5. Altekar, op.cit., pl.XIX, 6-9.
 6. Ib., pl.V, 9-14, etc.

she looks mortal.¹ Moreover, Skanda Gupta always emphasises his being chosen by Lakṣmī as king (sametya sarvān manujendra putrān lakṣmīhsvayaṃca varayaṃcakāra)² discarding all other sons for kings. Such ideas are very common to Indian panegyrists, but at least in this case, the restoration of the broken fortune of Skanda Gupta's dynasty (vicalita kulalakṣmīh, viplutām vaṃśalakṣmīh) may be attributed to the direct intervention of Lakṣmī and this type may be an allusion to this sentiment. On some coins issued in the post-Gupta period, an attempt has been made, possibly for the first time, to depict her with eight arms.³

This immense popularity of Lakṣmī does not seem to dissipate with the end of the Gupta rule. Even the leaders of their rival sects, Toramāṇa for instance, as he refers to her in his inscription,⁴ so does ^{he} depict her image on his coins.⁵ The Lakṣmī device was popular even with

1. Altekar, op.cit., pl.III,1-15.

2. Jumāgaḍh Inscription, Line 5, CII., III, p.50, v.5. This reminds one of similar ideas so often repeated by Kālidāsa, cf: Ragh., XVII,25; 69.

3. Allan, J., CGC., pl.XXIV,17,18,19.

4. Svayaṃ varayeṃ rājalakṣmyādhigatasya ..., Erāṇ Stone Boar Inscription of Toramāṇa, Sircar, D.C., Select Inscriptions, p.396.

5. Smith, V., IMC., pl.XXVII, 2,3,4.

the later rulers like Pratāpāditya II, Yaśovarman, Vinayāditya etc.¹ right up to the eleventh century A.D. when her four handed image appears on the gold coin of Gāṅgeyadeva,² similar to the figures depicted on the coin of Vīravarmā of Bundelkhand³ and Gāhaḍavāla king Govinda Candra.⁴ The Gajalakṣmī image is represented on the numismatic reproductions of the Kashmir Kings viz. Pārtha, Kṣema Gupta, Abhimanya Gupta, Nandi Gupta, Tribhuvana Gupta, Bhīma Gupta and Queen Diddā, covering the period of about a hundred years (906-1003 A.D.).⁵ Nepal is not devoid of her numismatic representation,⁶ neither is Ceylon.⁷ Even Muhammad Bin Sam, the Sultan of Delhi (1193-1205 A.D.) has the rude representation of Lakṣmī on his coins.⁸

1. Smith, IMC., pl.XXVII,5,6,7,8.

2. Ib., pl.XXVI,7.

3. Ib., pl.XXVI,9.

4. Ib., pl.XXVI,18; Cf: also the coins issued by the Lohana dynasty, Ib., pp.271-273, pl.XXVII,14,15,16,17.

5. Ib., pp.270-71; pl.XXVII, 9,10,11,12,13.

6. Ib., p.283; Rapson, Coins of Anc.Ind., p.116, pl.XIII, 2; Banerji, R.D., Prācīna Mudrā, pp. 266-267.

7. Supra, p.161 .

8. Wright, H. Nelson, IMC., vol.II, pl.I,2.

Like her rājalakṣmī aspect, her character as a guardian deity is recognised on a coin of pre- or early Christian era. The coin, found at Puṣkalāvati (Puṣkarāvati, city of lotuses) shows a female figure, wearing a mural crown and holding a lotus in her hand; the inscription runs as pakhalavadi devadā,¹ the patron deity of the city of Pakhalavadi. The deity could be Lakṣmī who is intimately associated with ^{the} lotus flower and whose epithet nagara lakṣmī is not very rarely met with; the iconographic particulars are also in accordance with her descriptions.

In addition to her characteristics mentioned above, another and most profound Śrī-Lakṣmī aspect, that is her being a fertility goddess is also evident in most of her images where despite the garment, an emphasis on sex is applied. The Mathurā figure, i.e. the lady (identified with Śrī) standing on a lotus and pressing her breast² (it recurs in some of the Gajalakṣmī icons of Sāñchī) is familiar too in much older Mesopotamian terracottas representing the nude goddess. A similar

1. Camb.Hist. of Ind., vol.1, p.587, pl.VI, 10.

2. Supra p.164, pl. V.

fragmentary Suṅga terracotta figure is in the Metropolitan Museum, New York.¹ Another female figure almost in the same posture, found at Dandan Uiliq² has a child clinging to her. This figure is analogous to some Hārītī figures and might be compared to the Śaka figure of Śrī-Lakṣmī preserved in the British Museum.

While dealing with the individual icons of Śrī-Lakṣmī, we must refer to a very special variety which is a most distinctive type, occurring in her earliest representations, and never found in connection with any other divinity.³ Coomaraswamy calls it the Kamala-vāsinī or the padmālayā type in which the goddess

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1. Cunningham, ASIR., vol.1, pl.XL; cf: Marshall, Takṣaśilā, pl.CCXI, 35, 3b.
 2. Coomaraswamy, EA., vol.1, fig. 23. Most of the other representations also emphasise her fertilising characteristics, cf: Kala, S.C., Terracotta figurines from Kauśambī, pp. 34-35, pl.XXI; Motichandra, Ancient Indian Ivories, Prince of Wales Museum Bulletin, Bombay, VI, 1957-1959, pl.IIa; Kala, Sculptures in the Allahabad Museum, pl.XVIa, etc.
 3. EA., vol.1, fig.3.

is surrounded by flowering stems and very often holds one of the flowering stems in each hand.¹

Certain copper coins of Maues and Azes bear on the reverse a female figure standing between trees. Whitehead interpreted this figure as a Bacchante² amongst vines, but Coomaraswamy identifies it with Kamalavāsini or padmālayā Lakṣmī. In fact, it can be taken as a Hellenised version of the Padmālayā type on basis of the striking similarity between these motifs and two other representations of Kamalavāsini Lakṣmī, found at Bodhgayā, where the goddess is shown, standing amongst the lotuses, holding lotus stalks in two of her hands.³

1. EA., vol.1, p.179.

2. Whitehead, R.B., PMC., vol.1, pp.100-101; 122; BMC., pp.70-71; 89; Banerjea, DHI., pl.VIII, fig.4; Allan, CGC., pl.XV,16.

3. ASR., vol.1, pl.VIII; cf: MASI., XLVI, pl.III,7. Here, we may refer to a nude female figure standing between two lotus stems recovered from the ruins of Mahenjodaro (Mackay, Further Excavations at Mahenjodaro, pl. XCIV, fig.430) which, as a prototype of later Lakṣmī cult, could have influenced this particular motif.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH VIṢṢU

As a Śakti of Viṣṣu, in addition to her character as an individual deity, Śrī Lakṣmī was sculpted from the Gupta period onwards in various forms corresponding to various aspects of the god. Whenever she is beside him, she is supposed to possess two hands, thereby emphasising her subordinate position beside her lord.

VIṢṢU ANANTAŚAYANA

Thus, in the Anantaśayana or Seṣa Śayana or Jalaśayyā form of Viṣṣu Lakṣmī shampoos his legs, holding them with her two hands, the very manifestation of a typical loving and submissive wife. In this aspect, the god lies on the coil of the serpent Ananta or Seṣa, with Brahmā sitting on a lotus that has sprung from Viṣṣu's navel; one of Viṣṣu's legs should be on Lakṣmī's lap, ckapādo' asya kartavyo lakṣmyutsaṅgagataḥ prabhoh.¹ The ideology underlying this form goes back

1. Viṣṣh.P., III, 81, 3. Cf: Lakṣmīsaṁvāhyamānāḍiṅghra-kamalavayarājita (Ib., III, 106, 8).

to the age of the Rgveda where the original principle, known as Viśvakarman is described in the following manner:

"That which is beyond the sky, beyond the earth, beyond Gods and spirits - what earliest embryo did the waters contain, in which all the gods were beheld? The waters contain that earliest embryo in which all the gods were collected. One (receptacle) rested upon the navel of the unborn, wherein all beings stood." 1

In later mythology, Nārāyaṇa, residing in the water, is stated to have slept on the serpent Ananta in the primordial age. A large lotus, that is the earth with its seven islands, forests and seas, came forth and in the midst of its petals, Brahmā was born. The Mahābhārata expresses the same idea when it states that all creation proceeds from Viṣṇu, lying in meditation on Śeṣa.² The Agni Purāṇa describes this particular form of Viṣṇu as having three eyes, lying on his

1. Cf: Banerjea, DHI., p.276; RV., X,82,5-6:

paro divā paraḥ evā prthivyā paro devebhirasurairyasati
kaṁ svigarthaṁ prathamam dadhra āpo yatra devāḥ saura
paśyanta viśve
tamidgarbham prathamam dadhra āpo yatra devāḥ saura
gacchanta viśve
ajasya nabhavadhye kamarpitam yasmin viśvāni bhuvaṇāni
tasthuḥ

2. Mbh., III, 273, 44-48 (Kumbh.ed.). Cf: for further explanations, Dutt, M.M., Ag.P., vol. I, pp. 180-81; Zimmer, H. AIA., pp. 12-14.

left side in the ocean; one of his legs is held by Śrī, and Vimalā and others wave a caurī over him;

trineta vāmapārśve' pi śāyito jalaśayyāpi
śriyā dhṛtaikacarāṇo vimalādyābhir īditah¹

But the actual representations do not always correspond to the descriptions in every minute detail. Thus, Viṣṇu has sometimes been represented as lying on his right side² and sometimes also on his back.³

It may be concluded from the discovery of numerous reproductions that the Anantaśayana form of Viṣṇu was very much in vogue in India. A very fine panel comes from Deogarh, which can be said to belong to the Gupta period. It shows Viṣṇu lying on his left side on the seven-hooded snake, Lakṣmī shampooing his leg and Vimalā standing near his feet with a cāmara in her hand, while a figure, possibly a nāga king, stands beside her. The four-headed figure of Brahmā is on the lotus

1. Ag.P., XLIX., 23-4.

2. Larousse Encycl.of Myth., p.360. (Sculpture on a rock at Hampi, Madras).

2. Ib., p.379 (at Mahābalīpuram).

growing from Viṣṇu's navel,¹ while five other celestial beings - viz. Indra on his airāvata, Śiva and Durgā on vr̥ṣa, Kārttikeya on his mayūra and another unidentified figure with a garland - can be seen above. Underneath, six other figures, including a female, identified as Pañcapāṇḍava and Draupadī, in allusion to the Mahābhārata story, have been sculpted.²

A late medieval figure of Anantaśayana from the Viṣṇupāda temple seems to have followed the Gupta sculpture in its execution.³

But there are some interesting variations in this type of representation. Thus, in one sculpture from ⁴Aihole, we find a female figure sitting near Viṣṇu's head while another female figure attends at his feet. This image might illustrate the Bhogaśayana aspect of

1. Cf: Ait.Br., I,30,30 states that the lotus is - 'this Srī, this the overlordship - this the resort or support (āyatana) of Prajāpati'; in an elaborate description of Brahmā's throne Vicakṣaṇā (Kauś.Up., I,5) Srī is the cushion on which Brahma sits. So it might be said that in addition to her anthropomorphic form, Srī may be present here in the lotus.
2. Calssical Age, pl.XXII, fig. 50. One Anantaśayana Viṣṇu image (now in the Prince of Wales Museum) depicts Viṣṇu as touching the head of Lakṣmī with his hand. Kramrisch, S., The Art of India, pl.LXII.
3. Banerji, R.D., EISMS., pl.XLIX.
4. Cf: Rao, EH I, Vol. I, pp. 112-13.

the god, as it is described in the Vaikhānasa Āgama: the figure of Śrī should be seated at the head in contact with the shoulder of the lord, with a lotus and a Kaṭaka in her hands, while Bhūmidevī should be at his feet touching the left foot of the recumbent Viṣṇu:

śiraḥ pārśve śriyam devīm devaskandhabāhūsparśam
sapadma dakṣiṇe hastam kaṭaka vāmahastām
pādapārśve mahādevīm vāmodiṅghra saṁsparśam
hastena dakṣinenotpalamdhrtām vāmahastām kaṭakam¹.

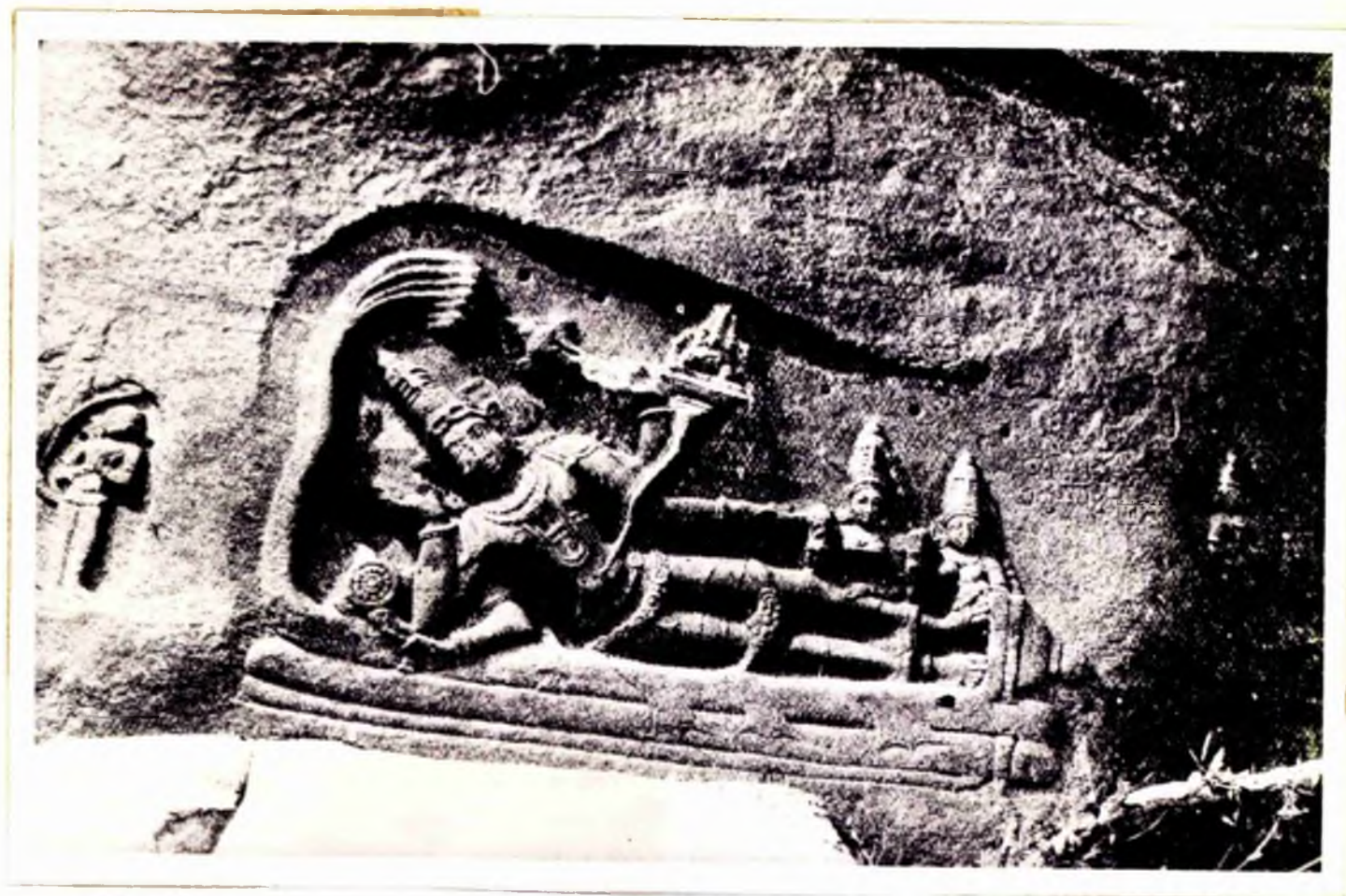
Another very interesting image from a rock near Hampi, Madras, shows Viṣṇu reclining on his right with the usual four-headed figure of Brahmā sitting on the lotus. But it is of particular interest that two female figures attend at his feet.² On the authority of the Vaikhānasa Āgama, they can be said to represent Lakṣmī and Bhū, thereby identifying it with the Vīraśayana form of Viṣṇu which is described as, pādapārśve śrībhūmibhyām pādamardakābhyām³ and this example thus invalidates Shukla's statement that no Vīraśayana image has so far been discovered.⁴

1. Vaikh.Āg., Ch. XVII.

2. Larousse, Encyclopaedia of Mythology, p.360.

3. Vaikh.Āg., Ch.XVII.

4. Shukla, D. N., Canons of Hindu Iconography, p.211.



VĪRĀŚAYANA IMAGE OF VIṢṆU WITH ŚRĪ AND BHŪ AT HIS FEET (HĀMPĪ)

LAKṢMĪ-NĀRĀYAṆA

In the Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa form of Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī is beauty and Viṣṇu is intelligence, the image being the union of both. A number of texts refer to this particular type, in which, as the name indicates, Viṣṇu as Nārāyaṇa is always accompanied by Lakṣmī. The goddess is generally seated on the left thigh of the god and her right hand should be thrown around the neck of the god, whose left hand in turn should be made to embrace Lakṣmī around her waist. In her left hand she should hold a lotus. The figure of Siddhi should stand near Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa with a cāmara in her hand, while below and slightly to the right should be the figure of Garuḍa. The personified weapons (Āyūdhapuruṣas) Śaṅkha and Cakra will be beside the figure of Viṣṇu while in front of him should be two upāsakas in Añjali mudrā, i.e. Brahmā and Śiva:

lakṣmī nārāyaṇa kāryyam su yuktam divya rūpiṇaḥ
dakṣiṇasthā vibhomūrti lakṣmīmūrtistu vāmataḥ
dakṣiṇakaṇṭhalagno' sya vāmohastassarojabhṛt
vibhorvāma karo lakṣmyāḥ kuṣṣibhāga śthitisadā¹

1. Viśvakarma Śāstra, cited by Rao, T.A.G., EHI., vol.I, p.57.

A sculpture found in the Kappe Chenigaraya's temple at Belur seems to follow the above description in certain respects. Here Viṣṇu embraces Lakṣmī with his normal lower left hand, and Lakṣmī also encircles the neck of her husband with her right arm. But instead of being represented by their personified forms (as has been stated in the Viśvakarmā Śāstra), the Cakra and Gadā are worked out as actual weapons. Siddhi waves a caurī to the left of the pair while another female figure stands beside her holding a sword, a shield and a vessel. The image of Garuḍa with folded hands has been sculpted below.¹

Most of the extant images of Lakṣmī-nārāyaṇa, otherwise known as Puruṣottama, seem to have been reproduced on the basis of verses of the Sārādā-tilakatantra which places Śrīpuruṣottama (Viṣṇu) with Kamalā (Lakṣmī) in the lotus seat on Garuḍa:

raktāravindamadhyastha garuḍoparisaṁsthitam
dhyāyed vallabhayā sārḍham jagannātham jaganmayam
devam śrīpuruṣottamam kamalayā svaṅkasthayipaṅkajam
bibhatyā parirabdham ambujāñca tasyām nibande kṣaṇam²

1. Rao, T.A.G., EH.I., vol.1, pp.259-60; pl.LXXVI.

2. Sārādātilaka Tantra, XVII, 30.

The Musée Guimet has preserved an eight-armed image of Viṣṇu with Lakṣmī on his lap, being carried by a Garuḍa.¹ Although all the gestures and attributes are not in accordance with the formula mentioned above, yet the image seems to have followed it in a general way.

At Ajaṇṭā, in the Raṅgmahal, there are some paintings amongst which the most important is a composition representing Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī riding through the clouds, borne by Garuḍa.²

According to N.R. Ray, the Lakṣmī-nārāyaṇa was more in vogue in the Deccan, and Bengal may have borrowed it from there. There is a śloka by Dhōyī on the Pavanadūta which suggests that Lakṣmī-nārāyaṇa was the Kuladevatā of the Senas (possibly referring to Lakṣmaṇa Sena's regime) and that homage used to be done with songs and dances from the book called 'Vāraramā'.³

Another type of image which is slightly different

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1. Zimmer, H., AIA., pl.425; No. MG.17469; cf: Cousens, H., 'The Damnar Caves and Monolithic Temples of Dharmanath', ASIAR., 1905-06, p.111.
 2. Coomaraswamy, A.K., HIIA., pp.100-101.
 3. Ray, N.R., Bāṅgalīr Itihāsa, pp.660-61.

from the type mentioned above is called 'Lakṣmī-sahita' where Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa, although on the Garuḍa, sit apart. One specimen is in the collection of the Dacca Museum.

MISCELLANEOUS IMAGES OF VIṢṆU AND LAKṢMĪ

In the Bas-reliefs of Bādāmī, in a relief called 'Viṣṇu in Vaikunṭha', there is a four-armed figure of Viṣṇu sitting on a high stool while Lakṣmī sits on the ground like a submissive wife, leaning on him, her left elbow resting on his right knee and while her right hand holds a lotus (?).¹ In another relief, Lakṣmī sits on the left lap of Viṣṇu who lifts her face up with his right hand. Attendants and musicians (the woman with lyre being identified with Sarasvatī) are also depicted on either side.²

In Khajuraho, a beautiful image of Lakṣmī holding a lotus and standing beside Maunavratī (one who has taken a vow of silence) Viṣṇu (as is evident from the figure with his finger on his lips) has been found.³

1. Banerji, MAI., XXV, pl.V,d.

2. Ib., p.15, pl.X,d.

3. Govinda Chandra, op.cit., p.130.

A rare image has been discovered which may depict the marriage of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī forming as it were, an exact parallel to that of Śiva in his Kalyāna Sundara aspect. The bridegroom form of Viṣṇu is known in the south of Kalyāna varada, Kalyāna veṅkaṭeśvara and so forth. This sculpture, found near Bundelkhand, is now preserved in the municipal museum of Allahabad. In this particular specimen, Viṣṇu is standing in a Samabhaṅga pose facing Lakṣmī who clings to him, bending her body, with her face slightly uplifted towards the face of Viṣṇu, her right hand embracing the god around the waist, while her left hand rests on her hip, possibly also holding a lotus stalk. Two Vidyādharas above their heads can be seen holding garlands, and a female caurī bearer stands beside Lakṣmī. Two other figures of Viṣṇu in his two different aspects, vāmana and varāha are depicted on either side of the central image.¹

In this context, we may refer to a very modern image which definitely depicts the marriage of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī. It is engraved on a stone behind the

1. JRAS., vol.XXI, 1955, fig.7.



LAKṢMĪ - PARINAYA IMAGE FROM KĀSHĪ

Vināyaka temple in Kashi. Viṣṇu is four-armed, holding the Śaṅkha and Cakra in two of his hands while two other hands hold Lakṣmī's hand and the lower part of his garment. Lakṣmī holds Viṣṇu's hand with one of her hands, while the other holds a lotus. The upper portion may have had the figures of the attending gods as remnants of their vāhanas, airāvata and Nandī can still be seen.¹

Similarly, an Ardhanārīśvara image of Viṣṇu (of about the sixteenth century A.D. and recovered from the site of Nepal) which has been preserved in the British Museum, is a late development, following the same motif of Śiva. The eight-armed figure of Viṣṇu on the right holds the Śaṅkha, gadā, padma and possibly a cakra, while Lakṣmī on the left holds a pustaka, padma, mātuliṅga and Śaṅkha. A kneeling figure of Garuḍa can be seen near the feet of Viṣṇu and strangely enough, a tortoise seems to occupy the side of Lakṣmī.² A Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa verse may describe such a composition as it relates how Kṛṣṇa of his own will was divided into two, the left part being that of a woman,

1. Karlekar, N.D., op.cit., p.5, cols. 1 & 2.

2. Brit. Mus. 12-15, 2, Brooke Sewell Fund.



VIṢṆU-LAKṢMĪ COMBINED (BRITISH MUSEUM)

and the right side that of a man:

svecchayā ca dvidhārūpo babhūva ha
strīrūpa vārabhāgāṁsā dakṣiṇāṁsah pumānsmṛtaḥ¹

Then follows a long description that depicts Śrī as the most beautiful woman.

LAKṢMĪ IN THE VIṢṆUAVĀTARA COMPOSITIONS

(a) Varāha Avatāra

The presence of Lakṣmī in some of the Viṣṇu-avatāra compositions is worth noticing. In the Varāha avatāra, one of the frequently illustrated forms of Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī figures are sometimes executed although Bhūdevī is more emphatically reproduced (cf: discussion above).

According to Rao, the sculptural figures comprise three different types: (1) Bhūvarāha; (2) Yajña-varāha and (3) Pralaya varāha. Purely animal forms of this aspect are also represented in the sculptures of North India, where the body of Varāha is covered with tiny human figures and the Earth goddess is shown

1. BVP., Prak.Kh., II, 30-36.



ARDHA-NĀRĪŚVARA VIṢṆU

hanging on by grasping the tusk of the animal. The first feature refers to the myth that Devas, asuras, ṛsis and others took shelter in the body of the avatāra (boar) while the second one shows that it had just rescued the goddess from the nether regions.¹

In the Viṣṇudharmottara purāṇa Lakṣmī has no place in the Varāha avatāra form of Viṣṇu, where only Bhūdevi appears, nr̥varāho varāho vā kartavyāḥ kṣmā vidhārane (or vicārane).² But the Brāhmīya Śilpa states that Lakṣmī should also be depicted by the side of the Varāha.³

The Agnipurāṇa upsets the whole composition by not only distinguishing Lakṣmī from Śrī, but even placing the latter on the elbow of the god, which was so long allotted to Bhūdevī. Thus the Agnipurāṇa says:

narāṅgo vātha kartavyo bhūvarāho gadādibhṛt
dakṣiṇe vāmake śaṅkhaṃ lakṣmīrvā padmamevavā
śrīrvāmakarpūrasthā tu kṣānantau caraṇānugau⁴

i.e. The incarnation of the terrestrial boar should be

1. Cf: Banerjea, DHI., p.414.

2. Viṣdh.P., III, 82, 10.

3. Mallmann, M.T. Les enseignements de
 1' Agni Purāṇa, pp. 28-30.

4. Ag.P., XLIX, 2-3.

endowed with a human body, carrying a gadā and other weapons in his right hand and the (divine) conch shell, the goddess lakṣmī or a lotus flower in the left. Śrī should be represented resting on his elbow and the earth and Ananta should follow his footsteps.¹

It is not easy to explain how and why Śrī came to occupy the place which was so long allotted to Bhūdevī, when she was rescued by Viṣṇu. But certain reproductions may have followed the Agni Purāṇa description in their execution. Thus the Mahābalipuram image, which can be ascribed to the seventh century A.D., has many remarkable details. Here the god holds a female figure on his right arm and holds her leg with another hand, while another female figure stands in front of him with folded hands, her feet still immersed in water and her head adorned with a Karaṇḍa mukuṭa. If the latter can be identified with Bhū, the other figure could be Śrī, in accordance with the Agni Purāṇa description of the Varāha form of Viṣṇu.²

1. Dutt, M.M., Ag.P., vol.1, p.177.

2. Rao, EHI., vol.1, pl.XXXVI.

Another verse from the same chapter gives a somewhat different description when it says

caturbāhūr varāhastu śeṣaḥ pāṇitale dhṛtaḥ
dhārayam bāhunā prthvīm vāmena kamalādharah
pādalagne dharā kāryyā padā laksmīrvyavasthitā¹,

that is, Varāha with his four arms holds Śeṣa on his palm, Bhū on his arm, while with his left hand he holds Kamalā (Lakṣmī). The next line says 'the Earth serves or attends at his feet while Lakṣmī is prostrate'. The description taken as a whole does not convey any sense, for the two goddesses are mentioned twice in the same composition! The only possible explanation lies in the probability of an error made by the copyist.²

But if we take only the first verse into consideration, then certain images become comprehensible. Thus, in the earliest illustration of the Varāha Avatāra, as it is carved on the façade of the cave, number four, at Udaigiri,³ the goddess Earth sits on the left arm (which is bent at the elbow) of the god who has another female figure standing to his right.

1. Ag.P., XLIX., 18f.

2. Mallmann, M.T., Les Enseignements Iconographiques d'Agni Purāṇa, pp. 28-30.

3. Banerjea, DHI., pl.XXV.

On the authority of the verse in question, the latter figure may be said to represent Śrī Lakṣmī. In one British Museum specimen, Viṣṇu holds the female figure (Lakṣmī?) by his left hand.¹

In the Bādāmī stone relief also, we come across a composition where the goddess Earth, instead of sitting, is standing on the left arm of the god while another female figure with a caurī in her hand, stands beside the Varāha, who might be a reproduction of his consort Śrī-Lakṣmī.²

Rao mentions two other types of varāha form, Yajña and Pralaya varāha on the authority of the Vaikhānasa Āgama. The former should be of white complexion and seated on a siṃhāsana with Lakṣmī of golden yellow colour being on his right, holding a lotus flower in her left hand and the right hand resting on the seat. On the left side should be seated Bhūmidevi of dark complexion with a nīlotpala in her right hand, the left

1. Ib., pl.II, fig.a; cf: Banerji, MAI., vol.XXV, pl.XVII,b.

2. Banerji, MAI, vol.XXV, pl.XXV. Here we may refer to a beautiful seal from Tipperah bearing a Gajalakṣmī motif which has another smaller seal with the figure of a boar attached to it. Bloch, T., 'Excavations at Basarh, post-script', ASIAR., 1903-04, pp. 120-123, fig.19.

hand being on the seat. The face of Bhūdevī should be turned slightly towards the god with an expression of wonder in her face.

tasya dakṣiṇe devī śriyam hemābhām vāmapādam
samākuṇṇeya dakṣiṇam prasāryāsīnām padmadhara
vāmahastām vāmapārśve mahīdevīm sasyaśyāmanibhām
dakṣiṇa pādamaṁkuṇṇeya vāman prasāryāsīnām utpala
dharadakṣiṇa hastām āsane nihita vāmahastām devam
kiñcit samīkṣyaḥ vismayotphullalocanām kārayet¹

This Yajña varāha form shows a particular ideology as the Yajña as a whole is symbolised by the boar and its various limbs are supposed to represent the different limbs (aṅgas) of the sacrifice.²

In the Pralaya varāha form of Viṣṇu, only Bhūdevī appears at his side. The reason, as the name indicates, is possibly that this composition depicts his annihilation of the Asuras and the rescue of the Earth.³

1. Vaikh. Āg., Ch. LVII.

2. "His feet were the Vedas; his tusks the sacrificial stakes; in his teeth were the offerings; his mouth was the pyre; his tongue was the fire; his hair was the sacrificial grass; his sacred texts were his heads; and he was (endowed with the miraculous power of) a great ascetic." Viṣṇu Smṛti, I,3; cf: SBE., VII, p.1.

3. Vaikh. Āg., Ch. LVII.

(b) NARASIṂHA AVATĀRA

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For the Narasimha Avatāra form of Viṣṇu we come across a similar description as that of Yajña varāha; Lakṣmī and Bhūdevī are to be represented on either side, Lakṣmī with a lotus in her left hand and Bhūdevi carrying a nilotpala in her right hand, the complexion of the respective goddesses being golden yellow and dark, as is prescribed in the Vaikhānasa Āgama.¹

But the composition of certain Narasimha images can be described as Lakṣmī Narasimha when the god sits on a padmāsana with Lakṣmī on his left thigh with her feet hanging down, supported by a lotus. Three hands of Viṣṇu carry the cakra and śaṅkha and form the abhaya mudrā, while the fourth hand embraces the goddess, and the left hand of the goddess carries a lotus while her right hand embraces her lord.² This particular type seems to be the giver of happiness (lakṣmīnṛsiṁha vijñeyam grhīnām ca sukhapradām)³ and

1. Vaikh.Āg., Ch. LVI. Cf: Banerji, EISMS., pl.XLVI where Lakṣmī holds a lotus in her left hand, the other half is broken.

2. Rao, EHI., Vol.I, pl.XLI, p.183.

3. One 13th century Lakṣmī Narasimha temple at Bhadrāvati has in the main sanctum a Narasimha image in sukhāsana with Lakṣmī on his left lap. Arch.Surv.of Mysore, 1931, p.6.

is to be reproduced in front of the village (lakṣmīnṛsiṃha ścaiva'api grāmasyābhimukhe bhavet) possibly as a guardian deity.

In another composition, both Śrī Lakṣmī and Bhūdevī are present, but in a completely different posture. Thus the Vaikhānasa Āgama describes the Sthauna Narasiṃha (so named possibly because he came out of the pillar) form of Viṣṇu, in which, as if to appease the wrath of Narasiṃha, who is engaged in destroying the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu, Śrīdevī, Bhūdevī, Nārada (with his Vīṇā) and Prahlāda (with his hands folded in the añjalī mudrā), should be shown standing to his right and left, tasya kopaśāntyartham pārśvayordakṣiṇavāmayoḥ śrīmahyām prahlādam vandamānam ca kārayet dakṣiṇe nārada vīṇāhastam ...¹ The Siva Purāṇa says that Lakṣmī was surprised to see Viṣṇu in that enraged attitude (lakṣmīścāpi tadā tañca drṣtvā vismayāgatā)² and did not dare to go to appease his wrath as she had never seen him in such a fierce mood (lakṣmī rvadati rūpam na mayā drṣtam kathantu vai).³

1. Vaikh.Āg., Ch. LVII, p.198; cf: Rao, EHI., vol.I, pl.XLIV., found at Ellora.

Jñāna Samh.
2. Siva P., LXI, 20.

3. Ib., 33; Cf: Bhāg.P., VII, 9, 2. Cf: a reproduction from the bas-reliefs of Bādāmi (Cave III) which has,
Continued over

SARASVATĪ WITH VIṢṆU

Instead of Bhūdevi, Sarasvatī or Puṣṭi sometimes occupies the left side of Viṣṇu along with Śrī-Lakṣmī who is represented on his right side. Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī have never been identified, but have sometimes assumed the same position, and have even, on occasion, been confused. Like Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī was one of the five mind-born daughters of Brahmā who were married to Dharmarāja.¹ Sarasvatī, though a consort of Brahmā now, was known to have been married to Nārāyaṇa (as is evident from various sculptures) and there are stories about Viṣṇu's negligence towards her when he favoured Lakṣmī.² Even nowadays, the legends of their eternal strife is common; that is, Sarasvatī deserts the place where Lakṣmī abides. (This myth may represent the development of a belief that money (Lakṣmī) made the wealthy idle and thus bereft of knowledge while

Footnote 3 continued from previous page.

among various other figures, a female figure, possibly of Lakṣmī on his left. MASI., XXV, pl.XVIII,a.

1. Mat.P., CLXXI, 29-36.

2. BVP., Brahm.kh., VI,1; Bhav.P., Madh.kh., ch.XIV describes how Narada saw Nārāyaṇa with Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī in Vaikhunṭha.

because of their continual studies, those with wisdom (Sarasvatī) did not have time or tact to earn enough. This idea has been beautifully expressed by Kālidāsa in his Raghuvamśa; nisargabhinnāspadamekasamsthamasmin dvayam śrīśca sarasvatīśca.¹

Later texts refer to the strife between Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī and Gaṅgā, the three wives of Viṣṇu: lakṣmī sarasvatī gaṅgā tisro bhāryā harerapi.² There is also the description of a four-armed image of Viṣṇu with his three wives beside him.³ It is said that once Sarasvatī cursed Lakṣmī and, as a result, Lakṣmī was born on earth first as the Padmāvatī river and then as Tulasī in the house of King Dharmadhvaja; Tulasī was married to Asurendra Saṅkhacūḍa. Saṅkhacūḍa adorned her with all the jewellery he stole from others and according to these texts Lakṣmī can be seen adorned with this jewellery. The Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa, while referring to Tulasī, describes her as

1. Ragh., VI,29; Cf: Vikramorvaśī, V,24, which also expresses a similar idea:

parasparavirodhinyo rekasamśraya durlabham
saṅgatam śrīsarasvatyorbhūyādudbhūṭaye satām.

2. BVP., Prak.Kh., VI,17; Devī Bhg.P., 9th Kh., VI,17.

3. Ib.

atīva sundarī śyāmā¹ nyāgrodha parimaṇḍalā
yathā dvādaśa varṣīyā ranyā susthirayauvanā².

It also adds that the same goddess was divided into two as Lakṣmī and Rādhikā³, (thus Rādhikā became a portion of Lakṣmī).

Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī have often been described as being part of each other:

yathā sarasvatī lakṣmyāḥ śaktistathā
lakṣmīropi sarasvatyā stanuvarttate⁴.

That Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī were sometimes confused is also evident in the Śrīpañcamī pūjā. In the Mahābhārata,⁵ Śrīpañcamī seems to be the day dear to Lakṣmī when reverence should be paid to her. But nowadays it is Sarasvatī who is worshipped on that day, and a verse states that on the fifth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Māgha, which is dear to Śrī, one performs the Sārasvotsava,

1. Being a plant, her complexion could not have been otherwise. Even now, housewives illuminate lamps and pay their reverence to Tulasī every evening.

2. BVP., Prak.Kh., XXXV, 5.

3. Ib., 10.

4. 'Yathā tithi tattva śrīpañcamyām', cf: Poona Orientalist, 13 (1948), p.4.

5. Mbh., III, 229, 51; cf: Baudh.Gr.S.Sūt., III, 5; Mānava Gr.Sūt., II, 13.

māghamāsi site pakṣe pañcamī yā śriyaḥ priyaḥ
tasyām pūrvahṇa eveha kāryyaḥ sārāsvotsava¹,

On the other hand, on the Kajāgarī purnimā night, when people celebrate Lakṣmī pujā, everything is supposed to be white² and this suggests that some confusion may have arisen here.

The verses on iconography in the Purāṇas state that Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī or Puṣṭi should be sculpted on either side of Viṣṇu, śrīśca puṣṭiśca kartavye
pārśvayoḥ padmasamyute³ or dadhānam dakṣiṇe devīm śriyam
pārśve tu bibhratam / sarasvatīm vāma pārśve ...⁴ But the Āgamas always replace Sarasvatī with Bhūmidevī. In fact, there is no doubt that the application of the respective texts mentioned above is regional in character, the Purāṇas being followed in the north while the Āgamas were recognised in the south.

1. 'Iti ca śāstravacanam samudhrvyah', Poona Or., op.cit., p.4.

2. Sarasvatī is always regarded as being all white (Mahāśvetā, śvetavastra sarvaśuklā sarasvatī) conforming to her character of a goddess of learning.

3. Mat.P., CCLVIII, 13

4. Mallmann, op.cit., pp.17, 41.

5. Several images from Southern and Northern quarters of India, belonging to an early period, corroborate this view. But gradually the rule was relaxed as is evident from some icons which, although they are from the same region, depict both Sarasvatī (Spooner, D.B., 'Viṣṇu
Continued over

Thus, in the Purāṇas, one finds Sarasvatī in place of Bhūdevī. In the Trailokyamohana aspect of Viṣṇu, the Agni Purāṇa ascribes a place to Sarasvatī beside Viṣṇu

trailokyamohana stārksye aṣṭabāhūstudakṣiṇe
cakram khadgaṃ ca muṣalaṃ aṅkuṣam vāmake kare
śaṅkhaṃ śāṅgagadāpāśaṃ padmavīṇā samanvite
lakṣmī sarasvatī kāryye ... 1

In another place the Agni Purāṇa includes even Bhadrā and Bala with others,

trailokyamohanaṃ mantraiḥ sthāpyas trailokyamohanah
gadi dakṣe śāntikaro dvibhujo vā caturbhujaḥ
vāmordhve kārayeccakram pañcajanyaṃ atho 'yadhaḥ
śrīpuṣṭi saṃyuktāṃ kuryād balena saha bhadrayā . 2

In the Vāsudeva form of Viṣṇu also, Lakṣmī and Puṣṭi Sarasvatī are placed on his two sides, but are not to reach a higher level than the hip of Vāsudeva

śrīpuṣṭi cāpi kartavye padmavīṇā karānvite
urummatrocchritā yāme mālāvidyādharaṇtathā . 3

Footnote 5 continued from previous page

images from Rangpur', ASIAR., 1911-12, p.154, pl.LXX,1) with her Vīṇā and Bhūmī (Ib., fig.2) beside Viṣṇu.

1. Ag.P., XLIX., 20-21.
2. Ib., LXIII,4-5.
3. Ib., XLIV,48.

The Hayasīrṣa pañcarātra illustrates the same idea when it states:

śrīpuṣṭicāpi kartavye padmavīṇā karānvite
ūrumātrōcchritāyāme kiñcid āvarjita tathā¹.

In numerous representations of Viṣṇu, mostly belonging to the period of the Pālas and the Senas, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī are sculpted on his two sides and are no higher than the level of his waist; Lakṣmī holds a cāmara while Sarasvatī plays on her vīṇā.²

In this context we can refer to an image of Viṣṇu, one "of the most outstanding artistic remains of ancient Bengal of the early medieval period". It shows the god in lalitāsana on the outstretched wings of Garuḍa, holding two lotuses by their stalks; on its pericarps are the miniature seated figures of Gajalakṣmī and Sarasvatī playing on her vīṇā.³

1. Cited by Banerjea, J.N., 'Viṣṇu', JISOA, XII, 1945, 1.75, n.1. Cf: Ag.P., XXIV, 47-49.

2. ASIAR., 1906-07, pl.LXXIV, b, from Sohnāg. Banerji, EISMS, pl.IV, fig.d; pl.XVIII, figs. b & d. (undated inscribed images) pl.XLIII, figs. a, b, c, d; pl.XLIV, figs. a, c; Bidya Binod, B.B., 'Varieties of the Viṣṇu Images', MAI., II, pl.VIII, fig.c.

3. Bhattasali, N.K., Br.Im. in the Dacca Mus., p.88, pl.XXIV.

It is only with the evolution of time that Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī became closely associated with their respective emblems. The images described above depict the goddesses with their vīṇā, cāmara, etc., but the Matsya Purāṇa, which is earlier than any of these images, describes both the divinities simply as holding lotuses.¹ What is of more importance is that the text adds that Pṛthivī should be reproduced in between the two legs of Vāsudeva, adhastāt pṛthivī tasyā kartavyā pādmamadhyataḥ.² Thus it affirms the fact that Sarasvatī was esteemed as Viṣṇu's consort long before Bhūmidevī, and the older date of the Purāṇas, which ascribe to Sarasvatī a position on his left side, corroborates this view.

PRTHIVĪ

Another Purāṇa gives a similar description of Bhūmidevī who is to be figured between the two legs of

1. Mat.P., CCLVIII,13; The Ag.P. prescribes padma and vīṇā; cf: Banerji, EISMS., where both the deities hold a lotus and a stalk. Cf: Lintel relief of a Vaiṣṇava temple from Gaur dist. Maldah where four-armed Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī images are on either side. (Ib., pl.XC., fig.b.).

2. Ib., 11.

the image of the Paravāsudeva aspect of Viṣṇu, but there is no mention of Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī. Her gaze at the lord seems to be characteristic of their relationship

madhyena trivalībhaṅgaśobhitena sucāruṇā
strīrūpadhārinī kṣoṇī kāryā tatpādamadhyagā ...
anudrśyā mahīkāryā devadarśita vismitā¹

R.C. Kak illustrates a well-preserved specimen of the above-mentioned type, which is now in the collection of the Śrī Pratap Singh Museum,² where the front hands of Viṣṇu hold a lotus and a conch shell, while the back hands rest on the heads of Cakrapuruṣa and Gadādevī; a half-raised female figure can be seen between the legs of the god, and may be identified with the Earth goddess. Thus the illustration looks like a true image of the description.

As has already been said, the Vaikhānasa Āgama replaces Puṣṭi Sarasvatī by Bhūmi when the Vāsudeva aspect of Viṣṇu is concerned:

daivika vāsudevam siṃhāsane samāsīnam caturbhujaṃ
śaṅkhacakradharam

1. Cf.: Rao, EHI., I, App.C., pp. 66-67.

2. Kak, R.C., Handbook of the Archaeological and Numismatic Sections, p.49, fig.Ao.21.

Śrībhūmyām sahitaṁ tathā devasya dakṣiṇāvāmayah¹.

It further adds, that on the right and the left, there should be the images of the gods like Brahmā, and in addition to him, there should be by the side of Balarāma, the standing image of Revatīdevī, on the left of Aniruddha, his consort Uṣā, and beside Pradyumna, his consort Rohiṇī, while on the side of Sāmba should be his consort Indukarī. Thus it is apparent that the whole composition is more or less like that of the Pauranic Vāsudeva form except for the appearance of Bhūdevī in Sarasvatī's place.

The Mānasāra, which is also a standard manual of the Silpaśāstra belonging to the south, while elaborating the iconometrical and decorative elements, echoes the same thing, the company of Śrī and Bhūmi: Śrībhūmi dakṣiṇe vāme.²

The Silparatna's description is also remarkable in its concept of Viṣṇu as Sūrya-Nārāyaṇa where one verse mentions the presence of Śrī only, but the following verse includes both Śrī and Dharā,

1. Vaikh.Āg., Ch. LXI.

2. Mānasāra, Ch. LI; Acharyya, P.K., op.cit., p.53.

Srīdharāśliṣṭapārśve.¹

Only the Vaikhānasa Āgama, and no other text on iconography, describes some images known as the Vaiṣṇava dhruvaberas, a distinct class by itself, which shows some regional (i.e. southern) bias. These images seem to have been instrumental in the rise of a distinctive temple architecture, that is the superstructure housing all the three principal varieties of Dhruvaberas in its three storeys, a characteristic of the southern region of India. As far as their origin and developments are concerned, they may be seen as a later manifestation of the early medieval period. They were much later than the avatāra images, as is evident from the remark of Banerjea, "The difference between the two lies in the fact that we have some evidence regarding the existence of the former in the later Vedic texts, whereas there is none about the existence of the latter in them."²

1. Silparatna, V, 23 & 25. Cf: in this context, Viṣṇu as the Sun, supra p.122ff. For iconographic reproductions, see Rea, A., 'Chennakeśavasvāmī temple, Sompalle', ASIAR., 1902-03, p.87; Ib., 1922-23, p.89, pl.V,d; 1915-16, p.70; p.66, pl.XLIII,a, etc.

2. Banerjea, DHI., p.383.

A close survey of these images, i.e. the Vaiṣṇava dhruvaberas, which can generally be divided into three classes, Yoga, Bhoga and Vīra (which are further divided in their own respective spheres), would show how Bhūmi almost became an inseparable companion of Viṣṇu; in most of these images she is given more prominence than Lakṣmī and occasionally even appears alone with Viṣṇu.

Thus, in the Yogasthānaka mūrti,¹ either Bhṛgu and Mārkaṇḍeya, or Bhūdevī and Mārkaṇḍeya are said to be sculpted on the right and left side of Viṣṇu; there is no mention of Śrīdevī.

In the Yogāsana aspect the same idea prevails, tathā mahīmārkaṇḍeyam vā kārayet taduttamam yogāsanam.²

But in the Bhogasthānaka form, Śrī and Bhū sit on either side of Viṣṇu:

dakṣiṇe śriyam prabālābhām sthitam dakṣiṇa pādā
vāmam kiñcit kuñcitam dakṣiṇe kare kamalādhṛtam
vāmam prasārita devam kiñcit samīkṣya vāme
śyāmābhām dakṣiṇahastamprasāritamanyenīlotpaladhṛtām
vāmapādā kiñcit kuñcitadevam kiñcit samīkṣya ...³

1. Vaikh.Āg., Ch.XV.

2. Ib., Ch. XVI.

3. Ib., Ch. XV.

i.e. on the right is golden-yellow Śrīdevī and on the left is dark Bhūdevī, carrying the lotus and the water-lily as their respective attributes. They should stand with one leg firmly placed on the ground while the other should be slightly bent. Two well-preserved illustrations have been found which correspond to this description in its main features.¹

In the Bhogāsana aspect of Viṣṇu, the god sits on a Simhāsana with his consorts, Lakṣmī holding a Kamalā (lotus) and Bhūmidevī with a nīlotpala (blue water-lily) in their hands respectively. Other descriptions are also more or less similar to that of his Bhogasthānaka mūrti with the addition of a Kalpavṛkṣa sculpted on the wall.

An illustration has been found in the Bādāmī Cave III, which can be dated back to A.D. 578. It shows an innovation, that is, the figure is placed on the Ādiśeṣa. Other representations have been discovered at the Kailāsanātha temple at Conjeeveram; at Ellora (Rāvana kā Khai); another on a pillar at Veradapparumal temple at Dadikkombu in the Madras district.²

1. Rao, EHI., I, pl.XX; One in the British Museum, Brooke Sewell Fund, 6-13.1.

2. Shukla, D. N., op.cit., p.210.

Another form of Viṣṇu, widely known as Vīrāsana,¹ also depicts him as being seated upon a siṃhāsana supported by Lakṣmī and Bhū kneeling on either side,

pūjakasthāne śrīdevīm vāme mahādevīm ekajānukra-
menasayitvā.²

Only one example has so far been found amongst the ruins of Aihole. In the Vīraśayana aspect, both Bhūmi and Śrī should be placed near the feet of the god, pādapārśve śribhūmibhyām³ which has already been discussed.⁴

In a late image of Keśava, known as Vīrayanārāyana, of Hoysala workmanship, both Śrī and Bhūmi have been sculpted on Viṣṇu's two sides, but the sides seem to have been changed. Bhūdevī is on the right side with pāśa and phala while Lakṣmī stands on the left with phala and padma in her two hands.⁵

It may be due to her character as the deity of vegetation that Bhūdevī has been given a dark complexion

1. Vaikh.Āg., Ch.XVI.

2. Shukla, D. N., op.cit., p.210.

3. Vaikh.Āg., Ch.XVII.

4. Supra . P.238, Pl.XIX.

5. Arch.Surv. Mysore, 1931, p.46.

and red clothes, indicative of crops and fertility.¹
 The Amśumadbhedāgama² describes Bhūdevī as of a light green colour resembling that of the tender sprouts of the paddy plant, other attributes being a Karaṇḍa mukuṭa and yellow dress.

(C) KṚṢṆAVATĀRA

The south Indian images of Kṛṣṇa enshrined in the Vaiṣṇava temples correspond fully to the Vaikhānasa Āgama description of Viṣṇu, along with all the Vaiṣṇava emblems like cakra, Garuḍa and conch, but Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā replace Lakṣmī and Bhūdevī, other postures and attributes remaining the same. Most of these images in south India are known as Mannar, which means

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1. śyamavarṇanibhā bhāsvadrājīva samalocanā
hemavajñopavīta ca dvibhujā ca dvinetrakā
sarvābharāṇasamyuktā karaṇḍa mukuṭānvitā
raktāṃvaradharācaiva dakṣiṇahastotpalānvitā
dharanyākṛtirevaṃsyāt ...

(Pūrvakāraṇāgama, Ch. XII.)

2. sasyāṅkuranibhā bhūmir nīlālaka samanvitā
karaṇḍamukuṭopetā sarvābharāṇabhuṣitā
pitāmvaradharācaiva prasannavadanānvitā
padmaṃ vāpyutpalam vātha ubhayor hastayor dhṛtam
padmapīṭhapariṣṭāttu āsīnā vā sthitāpi vā

(Amśumadbhedāgama, Ch. XLIX.)

one who resembles a king, and king he was amongst the avatāras of Viṣṇu.

These images of Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā show the natural effect of their husband's exaltation as Viṣṇu, where Rukmiṇī is Śrī incarnate and Satyabhāmā follows Bhūdevī in minute details. The Mahābhārata says that Rukmiṇī was born on earth as a portion of Śrī, for the gratification of Nārāyaṇa, in the line of Bhiṣmaka, and was the wife of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, Nārāyaṇa incarnate on earth.¹ According to the Harivaṃśa as well, Rukmiṇī is the goddess Śrī incarnate, who was born at the instance of Brahmā, to fulfil some special object. Kṛṣṇa came and told Bhiṣmaka, father of Rukmiṇī, that she was not an ordinary woman but the goddess Śrī who, at the time of the descent of Nārāyaṇa, was asked by the gods to go down to earth. Now, to prevent her śvayamvara, he (Kṛṣṇa) has come at the command of Indra to see Śrī in her human form. Then it is told how Kṛṣṇa ravished Rukmiṇī who was to have married Śiśupāla.²

1. Mbh., I, 61, 90; 95 (Poona Ed.)

2. Hariv., II, 51, 31; cf: tām dadarśa tadā kṛṣṇo lakṣmīm
sākṣādiva sthitām
rūpenagryeṇa sampannām devatāyatanāntike
vahneriva śikhām dīptām māyām bhūmigatāmiva
prthivīmiva gambhīrāmutthitām prthivītalāt

Hariv., II, 59, 35-36.

This svayamvara of Rukmiṇī where she received Kṛṣṇa as her beloved lord seems to be a later adaptation and re-orientation of the Lakṣmīsvayamvara, and the idea of the Lakṣmīsvayamvara seems to originate from the story of the emergence of Lakṣmī from the sea and her selection of Viṣṇu as her lord. The Matsya Purāṇa even refers to the composition of a nāṭaka by Bharata called Lakṣmīsvayamvara and to its participants, Rambhā, Menakā and Urvaśī where Urvaśī acted as Lakṣmī

lakṣmīsvayamvaram nāma bharatena pravartitam
menakām urvaśīm rambhām nr̥tyateti tadā diśat
nanarta salayam tatra lakṣmīrūpeṇa corvaśī
sā purūravaśaṃ dr̥stvā nr̥tyantī kāmapiḍitā

(d) RĀMĀVATĀRA

Similarly, in the Rāmāvatāra form of Viṣṇu, where Rāma is just another manifestation of Viṣṇu, Sītā seems to follow Lakṣmī in every minute detail, and has even been explicitly stated to resemble Śrī,

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1. Mat.P., 24.28.39; Cf: Padma P. Sr̥ṣṭi Khanda, (V), 12, 81-82. Later, in the Saḍuktikarnāmr̥ta by Śrīdharaḍaśa, we come across a collection of five verses regarding the Lakṣmīsvayamvara.

tasya dakṣiṇe sītā hemābhā śuklāmvarā vāme padmadharī
dakṣiṇa hasta prasārita dakṣiṇam sthitam vāmamākuñcya
padamudbandha kāntikuntalam karaṇḍikamakūṭasanyuktā
vā sītādyākṣarabījānyāt sarvam śrīmiva, sītāmayonījām
lakṣmīm vaidehīmiti¹

Sītā has been identified with Lakṣmī in the Rāmāyana,²
 in the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa,³ and in the Harivaṃśa.⁴
 In the Abhiṣeka Nāṭaka,⁵ dramatised in six acts, Rāma
 is all along identified with Viṣṇu and he does not
 accept Sītā until the Fire god certifies,

imam bhagavatīm lakṣmīm jānīhi janakātma jām
sā bhavantam anuprāptā mānuṣīm tanum āśritā⁶

i.e. 'know that this daughter is Lakṣmī; assuming human
 form, she has come to you'.

Throughout the Adhyatma Rāmāyana (considered to
 be a part of the Brahmaṇḍa Purāṇa) Rāma is essentially
 the god Viṣṇu, and Sītā, who is abducted by Rāvaṇa, is

1. Vaikh.Āg., Ch.LIX.

2. Rām., VI,117,27.

3. Viṣṇu.P., I,239,41, rāmo janārdanaḥ sākṣāt sītā
lakṣmīstathaiva ca

4. Hariv. I,41,129.

5. Abh.Nāt., IV,14.

6. Ib., VI,29.

an illusion, while the real Sītā, who is identical with Lakṣmī and Prakṛti, does not appear till the end of the book when the fire-ordeal takes place.¹

The commentator on the Rāmāyāna quotes from the Padma Purāṇa on Sītā's birth: atha lokeśvarī lakṣmīr janakasya pure svataḥ ... etc. "Now Lakṣmī, the mistress of the world, was born of her own will in the city of Janaka, in a beautiful field opened up by her plough under the star in the second half of the month of Phālguna".²

Śrī is known as Sītā in Gaya according to the Vāyupurāṇa, lakṣmī sitābhidhānena.³

The Siva Purāṇa tells a completely different story about Sītā's birth in the family of Janaka. It is narrated how once Rāvaṇa raped Vedavatī, who dedicated her soul to Keśava and burnt herself with a determination to cause Rāvaṇa's death in her next birth. She then went beneath the earth to unite with Viṣṇu who

1. Winternitz, M., Hist. of Sans.Lit., vol.I, pp.578-79.

2. Muir, OST., IV,465n.

3. VāP, LVI,58; Śrīmad Devī Bhg. Book III, Ch.XXX,13, where Sītā is an incarnation of Lakṣmī.

also felt the same urge to be with her. When Rāvaṇa went beneath the earth, being fascinated with Lakṣmī's beauty, he wanted to carry her away, but was driven away by Viṣṇu, whom he asked for the favour that he would always meet his death at the hands of Viṣṇu. Then Rāvaṇa assaulted Rambhā, wife of Nalakubera, and was cursed to be slain if he assaulted a woman again. Later Lakṣmī was born as Janaka's daughter, and as Rāvaṇa carried her away, he was slain by Rāma.¹ Thus it affirms the hypothesis that Rāma and Sītā are Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī incarnate on earth.

But all these stories are mere later developments, and so is, according to some, the identification between Lakṣmī and Sītā. Pravarasena, in his Rāvaṇavaha clearly distinguishes between the two² and the passage referring to Sītā and Lakṣmī in the Rāmāyaṇa has been considered spurious by Bulcke,³ but this seems to be too far fetched. Various verses, referring to both Lakṣmī and Sītā, rather imply some kind of resemblance

1. Siva.P., Dh.Saṃh., IX,43-7; BVP., Prak.Kh., XIV, 1-21.

2. Pravarasena, Rāvaṇavaha, II,38.
C.S.J.,

3. Bulcke, Rāmakathā, p.271.

between the two and that of Viṣṇu and Rāma,¹ which ,
in the long run turned almost into a complete identi-
fication. It may have developed with the understanding

1. Cf: an̄garāgena divyena liptāṅgī janakātmāde
śobhayiṣyasi bhartāraṃ yathā śrīviṣṇumavyayam;
(Rām., II, 118, 20);

tāmuttamām trilokānāmo padmahīnamiva śriyam
vibhrājamānām vapuṣām rāvaṇaḥ praśasaṃsa ha
raupyakāñcanavarṇābhe pītakaūṣeya vāsini
kamalānām śubhām mālām padminīva ca bibhratī

(cf: the exaltation of Lakṣmī as Padminī, wearing a
garland of lotuses padmamālīnī, in the Śrī Sūkta, v.5)

hrīḥ śrīḥ kīrtiḥ śubhā lakṣmīrapsarā vā śubhānane
bhūtīrvātvaṃ varārohe ratīrvā svairacārīṇī

(Ib., III, 46, 15-17);

yā hi vaiśravane lakṣmīryā candre harivāhane
sā rāvaṇagrhe ramyā (sarvā) nityamevānapāyinī

(Ib., V, 9, 8), etc.

But one verse states that Lakṣmī took the human form
of Sītā in order to kill Rāvaṇa -

sītālakṣmīrbhavar̥viṣṇurdevaṃ kṛṣṇaḥ prajāpatiḥ
vadhārtham rāvaṇesyeha pravīṣto mānuṣīm tanuṃ

which supports the Śivapurāṇa story to a certain
extent (cf: Rām., VI, 117, 27). The Padma Purāṇa
also says that it was Lakṣmī who was born as Sītā
in the family of Janaka. She is here called
Ayonijā (not born from the womb) and we know how
Lakṣmī has been ascribed various births from water
and lotus. Sītā is also said to emerge from the
earth with a lotus in her hand, thus the poet seems
to visualise her as Lakṣmī,

atha lokeśvarī lakṣmīr janakasya pure svataḥ
ayonijā padmakarā bālārka-śata-sannibhā

Continued over

that Rāma was a portion of Viṣṇu. Thus in the Rāmāyaṇa the commentator comments on the words "Thou art Viṣṇu" (Viṣṇu tvam hi sanātah) as anena sītāyāḥ lakṣmītvam sphuṭam evoktam / taduktam parāśareṇa rāghavatve'bhavat Sītā Rukmiṇī Kṛishṇa-janmani iti. "By this it was clearly affirmed that Sītā was Lakṣmī. Parāśara says: "In the god's life as Rāma, she became Sītā, and in his birth as Kṛishṇa [she became] Rukmiṇī".

DATTĀTREYA

The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa refers to Lakṣmī as the wife of the Rṣi Dattātreya, one of the Caturviṃśarūpas of Viṣṇu, and it narrates how the gods, once harassed by the Asuras, took refuge in his āśrama and, being attracted by the beauty of his wife Lakṣmī, placed her on their heads and carried her away. As Lakṣmī was

Footnote continued from previous page.

Even the Vedic character of a goddess called Sītā, as she appears in the Rgveda (IV,57,6) as a deity presiding over agriculture or the fruits, could have caused this obvious resemblance between Sītā and Lakṣmī.

1. Muir, J., OST., IV, p.460.

thus placed on their heads, the gods became victorious.¹

But it is only in a special sense that Dattātreyā is an incarnation of Viṣṇu; usually he is an incarnation of all the three deities of the Hindu Trinity and iconographic references are also in accordance with that presumption.

But in the Agni Purāṇa, we come across an ardhaśloka, bearing a reference to the iconographic representation of Dattātreyā accompanied by Śrī on his lap;

dattātreyā dvibāhūhsyād vāmotsaṅge śriyā saha²
although any early representation conforming to this description is yet to be found.

HARIHARA

Another particular type of image, a composite form of Hari and Hara, known variously as Haryārdha³

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1. Mārṅ.P., XVIII-XIX. Then there is a discussion on the different stations of Lakṣmī.
 2. Ag.P., XLIX, 27.
 3. Uttarakāmikāgama, as quoted by Rao, EHI., II, App.B., pp.169-70.

or Harihara¹ in the Śaivite texts and Hariśaṅkara² or Sivanārāyaṇa³ in the Vaiṣṇavite texts, has been represented in the iconoplastic art of India.

There is an interesting story about the origin of this image in the Harivaṃśa.⁴ It narrates how after a combat between Viṣṇu and Mahādeva, at Brahmā's intervention, Mahādeva went into Kṛṣṇa's body and recognised himself there and they embraced each other. Only Brahmā noticed this inter-communion; he then went to Mārkaṇḍeya and elaborated a peculiar dream he had dreamt where Kṛṣṇa appeared with a hatchet while Mahādeva had a conch shell, disc and blue complexion, Kṛṣṇa possessing the bull while Śiva was mounted on the Garuḍa. Brahmā wanted to know the significance of this dream.

Mārkaṇḍeya explained that the dream meant that there is no difference whatsoever between the two personalities. He who is Viṣṇu is Mahādeva and Brahmā,

1. Silparatna, Ib., p.168.

2. Ag.P., Ch. XLIX, 24-25.

3. Mat.P., CLX, 21.

4. Hariv., II, 125.

all are one and the same, they have evolved from the same source. Half masculine and half feminine, they absorb themselves everywhere and in every object. To Mahādeva, Kṛṣṇa is great, to Kṛṣṇa, Mahādeva is great. They are of undivided origin and rule the universe with the same object, the symbol of unity in variety, the beloved of Lakṣmī and of Umā, etc., etc.

The Vāmana Purāṇa tells a different story, although with the same conviction.¹ Once, to convince a ṛṣi that he and Śiva were the same and that Śiva resided in his own self, Viṣṇu appeared to him in this dual aspect. In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Viṣṇu tells Śiva: 'You are fit to apprehend that you are not distinct from me, that which I am, thou art and that is also this world'.² Thus all these stories seem to convey the fact that this composite image is to represent the

1. Vām.P., xxxvi, 20-32

2. Viṣ.P., V, 23. According to Rao, in this particular type of image, Hari replaces Devī who is always portrayed as the other half of Śiva in his Ardhanārīśvara aspect. Viṣṇu is also viewed as the prakṛti tattva (EHI., I, p. 332) and this recalls the story of Viṣṇu taking the guise of Mohinī which enraptured Śiva.

compromise that the two sects, the Vaiṣṇavas and the Śaivas, arrived at.

As the name indicates, the left side of this variety of images is possessed of all the characteristics of Viṣṇu while the other side should have every peculiarity of Śiva. Even in the Mahotsavas in the temple of Harihara, the vehicles, decorations and ceremonies are alternately those that are peculiar to Śiva and to Viṣṇu respectively and these festivals are attended by both the Vaiṣṇavas and the Śaivas. But as far as the details are concerned, the texts differ with regard to the position and nature of the emblems to be held by the hands, and so do the different sculptural representations.¹

In the Agni Purāṇa, Hariśaṅkara is a member of the troop of Hari (Harer gana), as it is quite explicitly described in the chapter which concerns only Viṣṇu and his surroundings; i.e. under this form (Harihara), Hari takes the trident and the javelin in his right hands, adopting the characteristics of Rudra and Keśava. The Agni Purāṇa adds another interesting feature, i.e.

1. Mallmann, M.T., op.cit., pp.46-47.

the presence of Lakṣmī and Gaurī (the two respective consorts on two respective sides)¹;

hariṣaṅkaro hariḥ sūlasrṣṭidhāri dakṣe ca gadā-
cakradharôpare
rudra keśavo laksmāṅgo gaurī-lakṣmī samanvitah

which is totally absent in other Puranic descriptions.²

The actual reproductions of Harihara are not numerous and we have come across only a few mūrtis where Lakṣmī and Gaurī have been portrayed on either side of the central figure. Thus, in a panel found in the lower cave temple at Bādāmī, the upper right and left hands of the composite image hold a paraśu with a snake around it and a śaṅkha, the lower right is broken while the left is on the thigh. Pārvatī and Lakṣmī can be seen standing on the Hara and the Hari part respectively, carrying a lotus in one hand with the other hanging down. Garuḍa and Vṛṣa, the two vāhanas, have also been executed in between the central figure and their respective consorts.³

1. Ag.P., XLIX, 24-25.

2. Mat.P., CCLX.

3. Rao, EHI., II, pl.XCIX; cf: Banerji, MAI., XXV, pl. III, b.

Another such well-preserved image from Poona representing Harihara, a specimen of Cālukyan art, shows the trīśūla and akṣamālā (rosary) in his right hands and the gadā in one of the left hands, the other one being broken. Two vāhanas, as are prescribed in the Viṣṇudharmottara purāṇa, are kneeling near the feet while Lakṣmī seems to carry a śaṅkha (and not a phala as is said by Rao) and an indistinct object in two of her hands, while Pārvatī carries a padma and a phala. It is significant that there seems to be a lotus pedestal under Lakṣmī's feet, but it is lacking in the Pārvatī image. The padabhaṅga of Lakṣmī is also different from that of Pārvatī.¹

KALYĀNA SUNDARA

All these four personalities (i.e. Śiva, Viṣṇu, Pārvatī and Lakṣmī) are represented together in the Kalyāna-Sundara mūrti of Śiva, although in a completely different way. This particular type depicts the marriage ceremony of Śiva and Pārvatī that took

1. Ib., pl.e.

place in the presence of all the celestial beings.

The legend of the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī has been described in the Purāṇas, and this Saiva theme seems to have been quite popular with the sculptors who reproduced it at least four times at Ellora. But although the Viṣṇu figure is sculpted in all the early images (merely as a spectator), Lakṣmī is absent, and the Kanyādāna ceremony seems to be carried out by Himavān, father of Pārvatī, and not by Viṣṇu, as is stated in the Āgamas.

Thus, in the panel from the Rāmeśvara temple, Ellora (600 A.D.), the male figure standing in between Śiva and Pārvatī and pouring water, and the female standing behind Pārvatī and touching her shoulder, who have been identified by Rao¹ as Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī, seem to represent Himavān and Menā in reality, as the figure of Viṣṇu holding his emblem, the śaṅkha, can be seen on the right as a mere observer. That Himavān was the chief person to hand over his daughter is more obvious from another sculpture on the left side of the above-mentioned panel, which depicts the scene where Brahmā seems to approach Himavān to make the engagement final.²

1. Rao, EHI., II, pt.1, p.349.

2. SenGupta, R.C., 'The panels of Kalyāna Sundara Murti at Ellora', Lalit Kala, vol.Vii, pp.14-15,17; pl.IV, figs. 1 & 2.

The Bādāmi bas-relief also supplies us with a similar image where Viṣṇu can be seen as holding the gadā, the śaṅkha and the cakra while Himavān performs the lustre. Lakṣmī is still absent from the scene.¹

But in the period of the introduction of the Āgamas, Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī both appeared in the scene and not as inactive observers, but to perform the act of Kanyādāna. According to the descriptions given in the Pūrvakāranāgama² and the Uttarakāmikāgama,³ in the scene of the marriage of Pārvatī with Śiva, Śiva and Pārvatī should form the central figures facing east. Lakṣmī should be standing behind the back of the bride touching her at the waist, indicating that she is handing her over to her lord, while Viṣṇu should be standing in the background between Śiva and Pārvatī with a golden pot of water ready to pour in the ceremony of giving the bride to the bridegroom. The Aṃśumadbhadāgama⁴ and following it the Silparatna⁵ refer to Bhū along with

1. Banerji, MASI., XXV, pl.IV,a.

2. Pūrvakāranāgama, Ch. XI.

3. Uttarakāmikāgama, Ch. LVIII.

4. Aṃśumadbhedāgama, Ch. VIII.

5. Silparatna, Ch. XXII.

Śrī standing beside Pārvatī and performing the act of Kanyādāna, but no early reproduction portraying both Śrī and Bhū has so far been discovered.¹

All these texts inform us that the Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī images should be shorter in height, thereby enhancing the importance of Śiva and Pārvatī as the main figures. The sculptors also seem to follow these descriptions in executing the Kalyānasundara images.

In the Elephanta Panel,² although Himavān is still present in the act of giving his daughter to Śiva, Viṣṇu is also seen standing on the left with a big pitcher in his upraised hands. Lakṣmī can also be seen standing behind with her hands touching Pārvatī's back. The presence of Himavān proves that the old tradition was still being followed.

But in the Dumarenā or Sītā-ki-Nāhāni Panel

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1. But I have come across a late sixteenth century mural painting found at Maṭṭancheri which depicts Viṣṇu in procession with his wives Śrī and Bhū; another panel shows him as giving away Pārvatī to Śiva. Achan, P. Anujan, 'The marriage scene of Umā as depicted on the walls of Maṭṭancheri Palace of Cochin', JISOA., June, 1935, pl.III, 1 & 2.
 2. SenGupta, R.C., op.cit., Lalit Kalā, vol.VII, pl.VI, fig.5.

(Eighth century A.D.) Himavān is totally eliminated, and instead, Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī have been introduced to act as the guardians of Pārvatī. "The Dumarenā thus marks the point of departure between the older iconographic formulations and the new ones formulated in the eighth century when the Āgamas were beginning to influence the iconography of the Hindus."¹ In this sculpture, in addition to Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu, who are found standing on one side, all the celestial beings can be seen on their respective vāhanas, including Varuṇa on his makara, etc.²

A very fine sculpture from Tanjore, of a late period, seems to follow the Āgama injunctions in minute details. Durgā holds Śiva's right hand with her right hand while Lakṣmī stands on her right, embracing her waist with her left hand, and Viṣṇu stands beside Lakṣmī holding the śaṅkha and cakra, the other hand being in the varada mudrā. Durgā's undergarment, indicated in wavy lines, is a dukulavasana or a silk garment, as is described in the Pūravakāraṇāgama. Viṣṇu's description is also in accordance with the

1. Ib., p.17.

2. Ib., pl.V, fig.4. Cf: Burgess, 'Elura Cave Temples', ASWI, vol.V, pl.XXXVI,1.

Pūravakāraṇāgama, standing in a samabhaṅga pose with kirīṭamukūṭa, keyūra, kaṭakahāra, etc.¹

But what is significant is that although in all the Āgamas and in the Silparatna, Pārvatī is supposed to stand on Śiva's left, in actual representations, she is found on his right; only in a few reproductions does she occupy the left side of Śiva.²

A study of the Kalyāna-sundaramūrtis reveals the changes that took place in the existing patterns in the panels and undoubtedly exhibits the reconciliation between the two rival creeds, the Saivas and the Vaiṣnavas. In the Bādāmī ~~bas~~reliefs and in the Rāmeśvara cave temple, Viṣṇu is just an attendant god and is still in a subordinate position in the Elephanta panel. But in the Dumarlenā panel, he and Lakṣmī are the guardians of Pārvatī. Similarly, in the Daśavatāra cave, Viṣṇu holds the water-pot ready to pour water on Śiva's head. He was given such importance that in certain sculptures from Mādurā, he is the only god to be seen in the main portion³ and is of the

1. Ib., fig.3.

2. Ib., fig.6; EHI., vol.II, pl.CII; EISMS., pl.XCV, fig.c.

3. Rao, EHI., vol.II, pl.CVI and CVII.

same height as Siva. Thus the honourable position that he held in the marriage of Siva, shows the extent of rapprochement.

C H A P T E R VI.

C O N C L U S I O N

C O N C L U S I O N

In the foregoing pages an attempt has been made to trace the history of the worship of Śrī, who later assumed the name of Lakṣmī as well. This study tries to determine how the cult originated and evolved through the ages, so as to portray the goddess in a proper perspective and thus arrive at a better understanding of some of the problems involved.

From early times, man in his natural urge to survive, required protection from calamities and felt the need for food and other necessities of life. He felt the presence of some supernatural power that could fulfill his desires and thus became an object of worship. He wondered at the creative power of the earth and deified and worshipped her. In the Vedic period, he discovered the type of literature which could give expression to his thoughts and feelings, and all these desires were manifested in the Vedic Samhitas. The word śrī, which conveyed the sense of glory and fame, beauty and adornment, royal majesty and especially fertility, seems to include all these concepts. Individual deities were called upon to bestow upon the worshippers this śrī, which subsequently assumed the form of a goddess born from the head of Brahmā. The story as it is related in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa,¹ shows how the whole concept

1. Ś.Br., xi,4,3,1ff.

of well-being was embodied in the beautiful figure of Śrī. The idea underlying this concept of Śrī is that of good fortune, the meaning of which, however, varies from person to person. To Agni it meant food; to Soma : royal power; to Varuṇa : universal sovereignty; to Mitra : noble rank; to Indra : power; to Savitr : dominion; to Puṣan : wealth; to Sarasvatī : prosperity; and to Tvaṣṭṛ : beauty. All these wishes are granted, according to the needs of men, by Prajāpati, in the visual form of Śrī.

Another Vedic synonym for prosperity and well-being, i.e. Lakṣmī, gradually merged into the Śrī concept. In the Vājasaneyī Samhitā, they are still two different entities, but become united in the Śrīsūkta. Even at a later period, Śrī and Lakṣmī are sometimes mentioned separately, but this is not necessarily in conflict with their essential identity.

In the Śrīsūkta, Śrī-Lakṣmī, now fully identified, assumes a concrete shape, a concept that was already inherent in the primitive cult of the Mother Goddess, which again embodies the concept of the Earth Mother and consequently of that of that of the Fertility Goddess. Certain Vedic divinities, especially Prthivī (the Vedic modification of the primitive Earth spirit), along with Aditi, Sīnīvālī, Kuhū, Rākā and others, played a role, although a somewhat marginal one.

This overall concept is first revealed in the Epics and the Purāṇas. Whatever was implicit in the Śrīsūkta became explicit in this later literature. Multiple stories came into being, partly in connexion with her many births; to emphasise her divine character, a miraculous birth from the ocean is attributed to her, and to remind one of her association with the human world, she is said to be descended from Dakṣa and Prasūti, or of Bhṛgu and Khyāti. Her union with Viṣṇu, which is the result of a gradual process, achieves its full confirmation. Even now, this union is looked upon as one of perfection. In addition, the sense of beauty is closely associated with her, as wealth and glory and fortune confer beauty. Eventually all the lovely maidens are modelled after her.

Owing to her great popularity as a giver of fortune, Śrī-Lakṣmī has found a prominent place in the history of Indian iconography, which depicts her alone as well as with other wealth-giving deities. As a devout wife she is also sculpted beside Viṣṇu. However, all her extant images make it distinctly clear that in his presence her individual importance is diminished accordingly, and this is shown by a reduction in the number of her arms, and the overall proportional reduction in her relative size,¹ thus presenting her as an appendage to her husband. Thus evidently Śrī has gained much of her recognition as an individual goddess, where her most profound aspect, i.e. the capacity of bestowing

1. Cf: Pl. xxxiii.



KALYĀNA SUNDARA IMAGE OF ŚIVA WITH VIṢṆU AND ŚRĪ-LAKṢMĪ

good fortune is appreciated and has encouraged the execution of her images on the walls and niches of temples and the gateways of religious buildings, both of Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva origin, and also on coins and seals issued by kings, whatever may have been their cult affiliations. In her own right, she has been, and still is, a recognised goddess in Hinduism.

The modern images of Śrī-Lakṣmī, which are also executed for the purpose of worship, do not differ much from her icons prevalent in older days. They depict her with her conventional (i.e. the padma, bilva, amṛtaghaṭa and śaṅkha) to which they add an ornamental container (known as Lakṣmī-jhāṇpi in Bengal) believed to confer all the boons, thus reminds one of the cornucopia; she carries a sindura holder as well, which characterises her as a devout wife, and in addition to all these, a new vāhana (traditional with all Hindu deities) has been attributed to her in the form of an owl.

How an owl came to occupy such a position is a matter of speculation. The occurrence is of a very late date and there is absolutely no evidence to trace its origin. The owl is an well-known emblem of Pallas Athena who bears a good deal of resemblance to Lakṣmī¹, but that does not seem to provide an explanation.

1. Thus Athena is a deity of wisdom whereas Śrī's brahmaśrī aspect cannot be totally disregarded; this aspect is even more pronounced in some images where Śrī holds a manuscript in her hand.



A TWENTIETH CENTURY IMAGE OF ŚRĪ-LAKṢMĪ

One might try to seek its origin in a Sādhana-mālā passage which prescribes a pecaka (owl) as a seat of Vārāhi. Though Lakṣmī can be identified with Vārāhi in her aspect of being a consort of Viṣṇu (Varāha), it seems that such an explanation is rather far-fetched.¹ The most plausible as well as the simplest reason for such an association may well be the fact the owl generally perches on granaries while Śrī is the deity of harvest. Another additional explanation that might have enforced this connection is that owl is a night bird and during Śrī-Lakṣmī's pūjā festivals, Lakṣmī is said to descend on earth and visit the houses of her devotees at night. This might have prompted the idea of her alighting on earth riding on an owl, the night bird.

Like Athena, Śrī is born of Brahmā's head; Athena is called all-bedewing, indicating that she is a goddess of moisture, Lakṣmī is called ārdra in the Śrisūkta; Athena presides over agricultural inventions, Lakṣmī is evolved as an agricultural goddess; Athena is always dressed in an armour and Lakṣmī as Vijaya-Lakṣmī, is reproduced in a Channavīra i.e. warrior's dress. Śrī has been also represented on Gupta coins as a true copy of Athena, depicted on Indo-Greek coins. There are, however, also very striking differences. Furthermore, as the presence of the owl as a vāhana is of recent origin, it seems unlikely to connect it with Pallas Athene, who is unlikely to have been known in India from the Gupta period.

¹ Cf. Mallmann, op.cit. p.151, f.n.3.

An Agni Purāṇa passage describes Cāmunda as uluka vadanā, but according to Mallmann the description should be uluka vāhanā and this is further strengthened by a British Museum image (no.72-7-1-83) where an owl can be noticed near the feet of Cāmunda. Cf: Ag.P., cxxxiv; Mallmann, M.T., Les enseignements iconographiques de l'Agni purāṇa, p.153.

Thus Śrī-Lakṣmī is represented in modern India where religious festivals are held in her honour. Owing to her immense popularity, she is invoked throughout the year. All the blessings that one can desire flow from her:

yathādeśa cakārāsau tasmāllakṣmīm samarcayet
śriyam dadāti vipulam puṣṭim medhām yasobalam
arcitā bhagavatpatnī tasmāllakṣmīm samarcayet .

1

and so says the Mahābhārata that if one performs all the rites, one soon wins success; as the sun embraces the east, the goddess of prosperity embraces him (abhivartati lakṣmīstām prācīmiva divākarah).²

Of all the celebrations, the Kojāgarī Lakṣmī puṣā, held in the month of Āśvina in the eastern part and the Dīpāvalī (the illumination of lights) in the western part of India, are the most remarkable ones. The details of both festivals are very similar in nature³

and the idea of the latter was possibly borrowed from the older practice of the former which seems to be a modern version of the Kaumudī-Mahotsava mentioned in the Mudrārākṣasa of Viśākhadatta.⁴

Lakṣmī is also worshipped in association with Viṣṇu which are mostly observed by women; this testifies to the fact that her character as a wife of Viṣṇu is not totally disregarded.

1. Kūrma P. ii, 21-22.

2. Mbh., V, 135, 31.

3. The festival of Dīpāvalī is significant in another respect as on the very day when Lakṣmī is worshipped in the western part, in the eastern part, Kālī, a manifestation of Durgā is venerated. Could it possibly throw some light on the relation between the two goddesses!

4. Viśākhadatta, Mudrārākṣasa, Act. iii, 3, 4, 5; Mbh., i, 121, 1.

Different days are prescribed in various texts for the worship of Śrī-Lakṣmī. The Atri Saṃhitā says that one is blessed with happiness if Lakṣmī is worshipped on a Friday.¹ Tuesdays are prescribed by the Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa and the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa.² The Śiva Purāṇa says that one should venerate her on a Monday (somvāre ca lakṣmyādim sampadartham yajed budhaḥ).³ But at present, the most common practice is to worship her on a Thursday of the bright half of the month (pratyabdam puṣyellakṣmīm śuklapakṣe gūrordine). It is evident thereby how her importance as a benevolent goddess is generally accepted.

In spite of all these celebrations and eulogies in her honour, Śrī-Lakṣmī did not truly transcend the materialistic barrier and reach the world of higher spiritual realisation. She could not rival Durgā in all her magnitude. It is due to her being the very personification of wealth and riches, the centre of material needs and aims, which, though bringing closer to the human heart (as, unlike other deities, she is venerated at every house in every evening), could not elevate her to a position beyond the extent of this earthy world. She is condemned as fickle (cañcalā) as wealth is not everlasting; in along passage in the Kādambarī,

1. Atri Saṃh., XLVII, 16.

2. BVP. Prak.Kh.xxxvi, 1; Devī Bhg.P.Kh.ix, 39, 27-29.

3. Śiva P. Vidyēśvara Saṃh., 12, 29.

she is described as so unstable that even in a picture she moves and it says that if she clings to Nārāyaṇa, it is only that she may enjoy his constant change of forms (vyuhas and avatāras).¹ She is compared with a courtesan staying in the crown of the king (bhūpāla-mukuṭi-viharāṇa-vyāpāra-panyāṅganām)² and to live with malice and hatred, greediness and arrogance. She has been attributed to a world of pleasure completely detached from the world of greater realisations. This finds an echo in the Vairāgya Śataka where the poet, who denounces the world to become a yogin after his life-long lessons from experiences and observations, begs Śrī-Lakṣmī not to be kind to him,

mātarlakṣmī bhajasvakamcidparam
bhaktāṅkṣiṇī māsmā bhūrbhogesu sprhayālavastava
vaśe kā niḥsprhāṇām asi,³

i.e. 'O mother Lakṣmī, serve (thou) someone else, do not be longing for me. Those who desire enjoyment are subject to thee, but what art thou to us who are free from desires?'

Thus, the whole survey demonstrates how the materialistic factors which lead to the conception of Lakṣmī-Śrī, on the one hand endow the goddess with unlimited power, on the other hand constitute a barrier to the achievement of real spiritual greatness.

1. Bāṇabhaṭṭa, Kādambarī, 210ff.

2. Bhartrhari, Śrīgāra Śataka, 19.

3. Ib. Vairāgya Śataka, 93.

APPENDIX

LEGENDS OF THE ORIGIN OF LAKSMI.

DIFFERENT STORIES OF THE ORIGIN OF ŚRĪ-LAKṢMĪ

Śrī-Lakṣmī, in later times, was credited with multiple origins and relations. Of the many legends concerning the origin of Śrī-Lakṣmī, the best known account seems to be the churning of the ocean narrated in the two great Epics as well as in certain Purāṇas.

But Parāśara says¹ that her first birth was as the daughter of Bhṛgu and Khyāti, and that it was only at a subsequent period that she was produced from the sea. Thus goes the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. 'The divinities Dhātṛ and Vidhātṛ were born of Bhṛgu and Khyāti, as was a daughter, Śrī, the wife of Nārāyaṇa, the god of gods'.² The Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa also ascribes her parentage to Bhṛgu and Khyāti, and adds that she had two sons by Nārāyaṇa called Bala and Uṇmāda. But the Vāyu Purāṇa calls them Bala and Utsāha, and mentions the sky-going (horses) as her mind-born sons: tasyāstu mānasāḥ
putrā ye cānye divyacāriṇaḥ 1 Ye vahanti vimānāni devānām

1. Viṣ. P., I, 9, 139.

2. Ib., I, 8, 13.

3. Brahmāṇḍa P., I, 2, 1-3.

punya-karmanām.¹

In the Mahābhārata as well, the sky-going horses are the spiritual sons of Lakṣmī, and Dhātā and Vidhātā are her two brothers, but here Brahmā is said to be her father, tayorev svasā devī lakṣmīḥ padmagrḥā śubhā 1 tasyāstu mānasāḥ putrāsturagā vyomacārinah.²

The Harivaṃśa says that Śrī was born of Brahmā's meditation, the prolific and noble Śrī, being adorned with a lotus of hundred petals.³ One of the verses of the Matsya Purāṇa says that Brahmā created five maids: Lakṣmī, Marutvatī, Sādhyā, Viśveṣā and Sarasvatī.⁴

Now, all these stories about Śrī-Lakṣmī's relation with Brahmā and Dhātā and Vidhātā seem to be just the continuation of an older tradition, recorded in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, which made her the daughter of Prajāpati.⁵

1. Vā. P., XXVIII, 3. This association of Śrī-Lakṣmī with horses is reminiscent of an account in the Śrīmaddevī Bhāgavatam, which describes how Śrī was enchanted by the horse Uccaiśravas (referred to as her brother because of its birth from the ocean along with Lakṣmī at the time of the churning of the ocean) and did not pay any attention to Hari, who cursed her to be born as a mare. Cf. Śrīmad Devī Bhāgavatam, VI, 17, 53ff.

2. Mbh., I, 66, 51.

3. Hariv., III, 20, 6.

4. Mat. P., CLXXI, 32.

5. ŚBr., XI, 4, 3, 1ff.

Brahmā is the father of Lakṣmī in these texts, again it is Brahmā who created Bhṛgu, father of Śrī, as it is said in the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa which continues: bhṛgeva ca dadau Khyātim rūpeṇa pratimā śubham śriyam ca janayāmāsa khacarāṁśca turāṅgamān 1 bhṛguh pradaccriyam devīm rājannārāyaṇasya ca 1 tasyām samjanyāmāsa balomādaumadotkatau,¹ Then Bhṛgu was given the beautiful Khyāti Śrī and sky-going horses were born 1 Bhṛgu offered Śrī to Nārāyaṇa, Bala and Uṇmāda were born of them.

At the same time another common tradition seems to be Lakṣmī's birth in the family of Dakṣa Prajāpati, where she is one of his many daughters² (the number of which vary in various texts). The Mahābhārata tries to justify the relationship by stating that Dakṣa and his wife Prasūti were born from the right and left toe of Brahmā,³ and Dakṣa seems to inherit

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1. Viṣdh. P., I, 107, 71-72. Cf: a place called Bhṛgukaccha (Broach, Barygaza of Periplus) where Bhṛgu performed asceticism and which Kaccha supported, was known as an abode of Śrī. (Sk. P., V, 3, 182, 184).
 2. Viṣ. P., I, 7, 21; Mārk. P., I, 20-21; Garuḍa P., V, 24-25; Padma P., I, 3, 183; V, 8, 175.
 3. Mbh., I, 66, 14.

much of the mythology of Prajāpati.¹ In the legend, Lakṣmī, along with nine other daughters (Kīrti, Dhṛti, Medhā, Puṣṭi, Śraddhā, Kriyā, Buddhi, Mati and Lajjā) was married to Dharma.² Sometimes the number increases to thirteen.

Now as far as this dual birth of Śrī-Lakṣmī is concerned, it may be assumed, that an unsuccessful attempt was made to maintain the separate identities of Śrī and Lakṣmī. She seems to be Śrī when she is a daughter of Bhṛgu and Khyāti (dhatr-vidhātārau bhṛgoḥ khyātir asūyatā 1 Śriyaṃca devadevasya patnī nārāyaṇasya ca 1³ devam dhātā Vidhātārau taylor jyeṣṭhā tu bhaginī devī śrīrlokabhāvinī 1 sā tu nārāyaṇam devam patnīmasādyā śobhanā 1 nārāyaṇātmaajau tasyām balonmādaḥ vyājayatām),⁴ Dhātā and Vidhātā are her brothers and She is married to the Supreme God Nārāyaṇa and gives birth to Bala & Uṇmāda.

Now, if we take account of the verses where she is

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1. Now all these stories seem to be an incessant attempt to stress upon the fact that everything proceeded from Brahmā Prajāpati, the creator and also to associate Lakṣmī with this human world. This finds support in a Vayū Purāṇa passage 'svayambhūva sūtayām' (Lakṣmī, Śraddhā, Medhā etc.) 'tu prasūtyām lokamātarāḥ' which means that the lokamātā gave birth to the svayambhūva daughters. (Vā. P., 10, 22).
 2. Vis. P., I, 7, 23; Viṣdh. P., I, 107, 90-94.
 3. Cf: Vis. P., I, 8, 14; Padma P., I, 4, 1; V, 4, 1.
 4. Cf: Brahmāṇḍa P., I, 12, 2-3; Vā. P., XXVIII, 1-2.

born of Dakṣa, she is always named Lakṣmī along with Sraddhā, Lajjā, Dhṛti, Puṣṭi, Medhā, Kriyā, Buddhi, Vapu, Śānti, Ṛddhi, Kīrti, and so on.¹ The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa also testifies that as Dakṣa's daughter, she is always Lakṣmī and as a daughter of Bhṛgu, she is Śrī.²

Śrī and Lakṣmī are even married to different persons. Śrī is always called Nārāyaṇa-varapriyā, patnī Nārāyaṇasya, whereas Lakṣmī is married to Dharma.

That Śrī and Lakṣmī were also differentiated at various other times is apparent from a number of references to them. One passage in the Mahābhārata states: 'Hrī, Śrī, Kīrti, Dyuti, Puṣṭi, Umā, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī protect thee'.³ In another place, Viṣṇu says to Nārada: 'Behold also Śrī and Lakṣmī and Kīrti, and the Earth with her hump'.⁴ Śrī and Lakṣmī are also distinctly mentioned as two different goddesses, living in the same place of Indra with Mahendrānī.⁵ In the Aranya Kāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa, Rāvaṇa, struck by Sītā's beauty asks her if she is Śrī, Hrī, Kīrti or Lakṣmī or some

1. Viṣ. P., I, 7, 21; Mārk. P., II, 6, 1; L, 20-21; Garuḍa P., V, 24-25; Padma P., I, 3, 183; V, 3, 175; Brahmāṇḍa P., I, 9, 58-59.

2. Viṣdh. P., 1, 107, 92-94.

3. Mbh., III, 37, 33.

4. Ib., XII, 326, 52 (Poona Ed.).

5. Ib., II, 7, 4.

Apsaras.¹ Thus traces of their separate identities may occasionally be discerned in the Epics.

Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra refers to Śrī and Lakṣmī and a number of other goddesses as divine mothers who are invoked for success.² The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, while enumerating Vaiṣṇava objects, lists Lakṣmīḥ kariṣīnī (kariṣaṇī) śrīśca tathā devī vibhāvarī 1 cakraḥ sudarśanaḥ proktaḥ śārṅgaṃ cāpaṃ tu vaiṣṇavam.³ Other conclusive evidence is found in the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa which for the first time prescribed the worship of Śrīdhara with Śrī and of Janārdana with Lakṣmī.⁴

But rather than interpreting these references, especially as far as the birth legends are concerned, as attempts to maintain the separate identities of Śrī and Lakṣmī as it would seem at first, we should consider them as being traditional in maintaining their respective nomenclatures as they occur in the original stories without any deliberate attempt at separation. The only controversial point is Lakṣmī's marriage to Dharma. This was presumably an earlier event of her history as is evident in a Mahabhārata story which reveals this association with Dharma as a step towards her union with

1. Cf: Rām., III, 46, 16-17.

2. Bharata, Nāṭyaśāstra, III, 87.

3. Viṣdh. P., III, 8, 4.

4. Ib., III, 216.

Viṣṇu.¹ Priority of this birth is also suggested by the fact that Dakṣa becomes Lakṣmī's father in this legend in his capacity as Dakṣa Prajāpati and thus the story may be regarded as a direct succession of the story of Brahmā's parenthood.² Lastly it may be said that when Śrī is mentioned along with Lakṣmī, sometimes it might indicate their separate identities, but at other times the former has been used to symbolise prosperity. This finds a supporting echo in the first verse of the Junāgarh Rock inscription of Skanda Gupta,³ which mentions both Śrī and Lakṣmī as it says that Viṣṇu, who is the perpetual abode of Lakṣmī, conquered Śrī for the enjoyment of Indra. Here Śrī definitely refers to prosperity or fortune or royal sovereignty since Lakṣmī is already mentioned as Viṣṇu's wife; further it is rather unlikely that a being, whether human or divine, would rescue his own wife for somebody else's pleasure.

However, occasional references to their separate identities are not continued in the later period. As they were fully-merged into each other in the Śrī-Sūkta, so did they retain this unity. In the Sāntiparva⁴ Śrī says clearly

1. Mbh., XII, 59, 133ff. (Poona Ed.) Cf: infra, p.298.

2. SBr., XI, 4, 3, 1ff.

3. Fleet, J., CII., III, p. 158, No. 14, line 1.

4. Mbh., XII, 225, 8.

that she is also known as Lakṣmī. That these names can be indiscriminately applied to the same divinity is apparent from these two phrases: yato rājir dhṛtistatra śrīśca tatra yato dhṛtiḥ | yato dhṛtiśca śrīścaiva dharmaśca tatra jayastathā and rājir yatas tato lakṣmīr, yato lakṣmīstato dhṛtiḥ | yato dhṛtiś, tato dharmo, yato dharmaś, tato jayah.² This fusion seems to be complete in a verse from the Kūrma Purāṇa where Lakṣmī as Bhṛgu's daughter is married to Viṣṇu, bhṛgoḥ khyātyām samutpannā lakṣmī viṣṇupariagrahaḥ tathā³

This association of Śrī-Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu seems to be a development of her primary attachment to Dharma, and can only be understood with a proper interpretation of all the abstractions and terms implicit in the names of the divinities involved.

In fact, it refers to another episode of Śrī-Lakṣmī's birth. In the Mahābhārata, Brahmā says that under the rule of King Prthu, the whole world was flourishing with righteousness, and at that time, a golden lotus was born from Viṣṇu's

1. Brahma P., II, 7.

2. Brahmāṇḍa P., II, 67, 84; Cf: Vāyu. P., LXLII, 79, here, except for Śrī being replaced by Lakṣmī, everything remains the same.

3. Kūrma P., XIII, 1; Cf: Viṣ. P., 1, 10, 2.

brow, and the goddess Śrī was born of that lotus,¹ (Viṣṇor-lalātāt Kamalam sauvarṇamabhavattadā 1 śrīḥ sambhūtā yato devī patnī dharmasyādhīmataḥ 1 śriyaḥ sakāśādarthaśca jāto dharmena pāṇḍava).² Śrī became the spouse of Dharma of great intelligence. Upon Śrī, Dharma begot Artha. Then, (atha dharma stathaiivārthah śrīśca rāje pratiṣṭhitā),³ i.e., all these three, Dharma, Artha and Śrī, were established in sovereignty. Although here, the poet evidently uses a myth to explain the abstract idea of dharma (duty, justice), artha (meaning, significance) and śrī (abundance, wealth) and their connection with sovereign authority, all the abstractions having been personified.

The next passage continues by stating that a person, upon the exhaustion of his merit, comes down from heaven to earth, takes birth as a king conversant with the theory of government, becomes endowed with greatness and can be said to be a portion of Viṣṇu on earth, 'sukṛtasya Kṣayāccaiva svarlokādetya medinīm 1 pārthivo jāyate tato daṇḍanītivaśānugah!

1. Mbh. XII, 59, 133 (Poona Ed.); according to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (VII, 5, 40) Śrī came out of Viṣṇu's chest and these are just stray references to their relationship at its initial stage where Viṣṇu is regarded as the creator of Śrī-Lakṣmī only to take over the position of her husband in later times.

2. Mbh., XII, 59, 133-34 (Poona Ed.).

3. Ib., 134 (Poona Ed.).

4. Mbh., XII, 59, 135 (Poona Ed.).

Thus the King is associated with Śrī and is himself a part of Viṣṇu; this might supply the link between Viṣṇu and Śrī or more particularly Rājyaśrī.¹

The Epic literature further develops the mythology of Śrī and refers to her various traits in different contexts. The most famous Epic account of her origin, also much stressed in the Purāṇas, is that she was churned out of the ocean by the gods and demons, along with such substances as Uccaiśravas surā, nectar, etc. This has numerous times been narrated in literature, as well as depicted in art; this is the legend that according to scholars, alludes to the Gajalakṣmī or rather the Abhiṣeka type of Lakṣmī mūrti. The main theme of this amṛta-manthana story is more or less the same in different versions, but the details vary, and in some places, the circumstances have undergone several changes.

The themes are all closely interrelated as they are in fact all variations on a single theme, and so tend to appear in clusters in any myth.

One might tend to look for its origin in the Vedas. The term 'amṛta' (the elixir of immortality) was already known to the Vedas and seems to have been applied to various

1. Cf: in this regard how in the Angi Purāṇa (CCXXXVII) the King desirous of success in war is asked to repeat the Śrīstava that was recited by Indra.

offerings in the sacrifice, but more in particular to the soma juice.

It seems that in the late Vedic period, that of the white Yajurveda, under the influence of philosophical speculation, the rank of the deities became more defined, the idea of a universal spirit developed, and the inferior gods, who were held to have been mortal at first, were said to have attained immortality by sacrificing amṛta (i.e. Soma) to Agni. It may have been from this idea, i.e. blessings brought by sacrificing Soma (amṛta), that this myth arose, the Soma juice converted into the elixir produced at the churning of the ocean.

Such an idea is, in fact, reflected in the Samudra manthana account. According to the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa,¹ the gods, feeling their weakness, having been worsted by the demons, begged Viṣṇu for renewed vigour and the gift of immortality. Viṣṇu directed them to churn the ocean for the amṛta, which was capable of bestowing immortality upon them.

All the accounts exhibit a Vaiṣṇava bias, as the churning could be carried on only when Viṣṇu gave his energy

1. Mbh., I, 18; V, 102, 12ff; jānāmi amṛtasya ca manthanam, Rām., IV, 58, 13; I, 45.

and his blessings to the gods. In the Mahābhārata,¹ the divine tortoise upholds the mountain-churn of his own accord, but the later Rāmāyaṇa identifies the tortoise with Viṣṇu.

Śrī Lakṣmī does not seem to be given much importance in these texts; she is just one of the many objects that were churned out of the ocean. In certain manuscripts she is not even mentioned.² Nor has she been associated with Viṣṇu, which happens only later, as in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa,³ where she goes to Viṣṇu of her own accord. In this Purāṇa, the cause of the churning of the ocean is different as well. A long account⁴ illustrates how once Durvāsas, a portion of Śiva, being insulted by Indra, cursed him to be abandoned by Lakṣmī, and then, being devoid of Lakṣmī, the whole world grew pale out of fear of the forthcoming destruction and propitiated Viṣṇu, at whose command the churning of the ocean was performed. Along with various objects, Lakṣmī came forth, and the world again flourished with happiness. (This story presupposes at least one previous birth for Śrī-Lakṣmī).

Lakṣmī was then propitiated by Indra and, being pleased, she promised that she would never forsake him,

1. Mbh., I, 16, 10-11; V, 102.

2. Cf: Rām., I, 44 (Poona Ed.).

3. Viṣ. P., I, 9, 105; Cf: Viṣdh. P., I, 41, 1.

4. Viṣ. P., I, 8.

neither would she forsake the person who could recite the Stava that Indra uttered in her praise. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa tells the same story.¹ Thus these stories exhibit the rising importance of Śrī-Lakṣmī as the main object of the churning.

The Vāyu² and the Padma Purāṇa³ ^{have} the same narrative as that of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, and so have the Agni Purāṇa⁴ and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa⁵ except that they refer only very briefly to the anger of Durvāsas without narrating the circumstances. The part assigned to Durvāsas itself appears to be only an embellishment added to the original, as no mention of him occurs in the Matsya Purāṇa, nor even in the Harivaṃśa. Nor does it occur in what may be considered the oldest extant

1. Bhg. P., VIII. But the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa offers a different reason altogether. It says that Gaurī and Lakṣmī originated from the Parāśakti and were given to Hara and Hari. But once being insulted by them, Gaurī and Lakṣmī left their husbands who became lustreless as a result. So Hara and Hari repaired to the Parāśakti, who, in the form of Bhuvaneśvari, directed that Gaurī would be born as the daughter of Dakṣa and Lakṣmī out of the Kṣīroda ocean, and that they would eventually be reunited with their husbands. This narrative seems to belong to a much later period, as appears from the underlying tantric attitude to the goddess. Śrīmaddevī Bhāgavatam, VII, Chs. 29-30.

2. Vā. P., XLII, 9ff.

3. Padma P., V, 4, 1ff.

4. Agni P., III.

5. Bhg. P., VIII, 5; VIII, 8, 7-28.

versions of the story, those in the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata. Both of these ascribe the churning to the desire of the gods and the asuras to become immortal. The Matsya Purāṇa¹ assigns a similar motive to the gods, who were incited by observing that the asuras slain by them in battle were restored to life by Śukra with the sañjīvanī or herb of immortality which he had discovered. The account in the Hari-vamśa is obscure and brief and is explained by the commentator as an allegory, in which the churning of the ocean typifies ascetic penance and ambrosia represents the final liberation.²

We have come across several other stories concerning the birth of Śrī-Lakṣmī, but they are not very widely known. We have already discussed the story of Sirī Kālakannī Jātaka where Śrī is the daughter of Dhataratṭha.³ Another Buddhist myth refers to her as the daughter of Sāgara (ocean), a nāga king.⁴ The name of Sāgara and thus the story was possibly originated from her being churned out of the ocean; even in the later period, Lakṣmī, in the incarnatory form of Rādhā was born of Sāgara and Padmā. This also alludes to the same story where she came out of the ocean sitting on a wide open

1. Mat. P., CCXLIX, 14ff. Cf: also CCL & CCLI.

2. ——— Cf: Wilson, H.H. Viṣṇu Purāṇa, p. 77, f.n. 8

3. Supra, pp. 59, 171.

4. Saddharma Puṇḍarīka, XI, 48-51; SBE., XXI, p. 250f.

lotus flower.

In the Sundanese legend, Śrī is said to be born from a tear of Dewa Anta or Antaboga¹ (Anantabhoga), the nāga Ananta of the nether worlds. The significance or the reason behind the story is rather obscure. But nevertheless, these stories emphasise her association with the nāgas, and in the Mānava Grhya Sūtra,² Śrī is invoked to come to the worshippers in the company of the nāgas and the deities.

All these episodes, not only accentuate Śrī-Lakṣmī's popularity, but also demonstrate a human urge to associate her with the human world. The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, in one of its elaborate chapters, explains these various births as belonging to different Manvantaras. With some additions as well as some eliminations, the Purāṇa ascribes her seven births in accordance with seven manvantaras: (1) in the Svāyumbhuva-manvantara, she was born of Bhṛgu; (2) in Svārocīṣa-manvantara, from Agni; (3) in the Auttamasya-manvantara from the water; (4) in the Tāmasa-manvantara, from the Earth; (5) in the Raivata-manvantara from the Bilva; (6) in the Cākṣuṣa-manvantara from the blooming Lotus and (7) in the Vaivaśvata-manvantara, she came out of the ocean when Viṣṇu

1. Gonda, J., AEV., p. 221.

2. Upayantu mām devaganāḥ nāgāśca tapasā saha, Mān. Gr. Sūt; II, 13.

received her.¹ Thus, the description which does not mention Dakṣa, gives precedence to her being born of Bhṛgu² and considers the Samudramanthana to be the last event; this further presumes her association with Viṣṇu to be a later development.

1. Cf: Viṣdh. P., 1, 41, 33-36, Svāyambhūve'ntare devī bhṛgoḥ sā duhitā, mṛtā, etc. etc.

2. The ascription of her birth to Bhṛgu may be owing to the prominence of the Bhargavas in the Mahābhārata, who, with their inclination towards Nārāyaṇa, bestowed Śrī on him. Then later, on the event of the churning of the ocean, Lakṣmī went to Viṣṇu of her own accord.

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